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GERALD HASTINGS
OF BARTON.

GERALD HASTINGS

OF BARTON.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NO APPEAL."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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GERALD HASTINGS

OF

BARTON.

CHAPTER I.

ANTONY SCORES AGAIN.

“Money well spent is out at usury,
And fructifies.”

OSBORNE.



LD Sally's funeral was of the simplest, plainest kind; but many of her poorer neighbours attended it, as well as Mr. Antony Hastings, in his own private carriage; and then she was laid at peace by the side of her master's grave. It was a strange

mixture of motives that led Antony to attend the funeral, partly because he thought it would please Miss Amy Thorn, partly because the old woman herself had begged him to see that she was buried as and where her will directed; and lastly, I honestly confess, because on the previous evening he had just peeped into a certain "large envelope," and noted with intense satisfaction what had become of the five hundred pounds; sealing it up again at once, and resolving to give it into the lawyer's own hands forthwith. In fact, he sent it to Mr. Thorn by a special and careful messenger, with an explanatory letter, that same night.

The next morning he went straight to Lincoln's Inn.

"I thought I had better see you at once," he said, "about the old woman's will. It's all right, I suppose?"

“As right as pen and ink can make it, Mr. Antony. But there is a little hitch about the money (this he said merely to try him), as I dare say you know? She had laid out her money in Guaxaras.”

“D—n the Guaxaras. Are we never to hear the last of them? The old woman told me only the day before she died that her money always came in regularly every week.”

“So it did, and I am going to tell you how. My daughter had just six hundred pounds in the bank, and when the mines failed she transferred this sum into old Sally’s name, and in that it still stands.”

“God bless my soul,” said Antony, “what a noble thing to do! Then I am quite safe,” he added, in an eager voice.

“Quite; and as you say, it was a noble thing, Mr. Hastings.”

“Then I’ll just step down to the bank at once and set matters all square. Good morning, Thorn; I see you are busy.”

“As abrupt as ever,” said the lawyer to himself, “and as fond of money.” Then he turned and went on with his work as usual.

Meanwhile his client walked on steadily towards town, and far more slowly than usual, apparently lost in thought, as indeed he was. He was, in fact, trying to make up his mind to an action against which his whole heart and being rebelled, and yet to which his true interest pointed. The struggle was a sharp one, but ended at last in his asking to see the manager of the bank, and having five minutes’ talk in his private room, which ended with—

“I shall be obliged, Dodson, if you will get it all settled for me as soon as possible, and without saying a word about it to any one at present.”

Then he wended his way homewards to the Manor House, still pondering as he went, and weighing in a careful balance what he had just done.

“By Jove, Mr. Antony Hastings (so ran his thoughts), one would think that you were made of money to sweep away hundreds in this fashion! Still, it will be a good day’s work, money well spent, if it helps to win such a woman for my wife. She *is* worth it, by Jove.” And then he went carefully over all the ground again, and looking at the question from every point of view, once more decided that it was indeed “well laid out, a capital investment.”

Mr. Thorn, as we have said, went on with his business as usual; but he was once more doomed to be interrupted in a way that he did not at all expect, by an old client named Stoker, who suddenly entered his office.

“Ah! Thorn,” said the new comer, “I am glad to have caught you. I have had to come up to town in a great hurry, to raise some money for a son just off to sea, and a daughter who is going to be married; and the fact is, I shall have to sell out about five thousand pounds of those railway shares that have been sleeping in your box all these long years, and paying such a good interest.”

“There they are, Captain Stoker, in your own tin box; *there*, in the corner, that one labelled S.S.”

“Yes, I see,” replied the Captain; “and I only wish they could stay where they are. But young lieutenants, you see, will have new kits, and young women will have husbands, and then somebody must pay the piper. How soon can you get the money for me? I want to go back to-night, if you can manage it.”

“No difficulty whatever, my dear sir. I will ring for Simmons at once.”

Enter Simmons.

“Simmons,” said Mr. Thorn, “Captain Stoker wishes to sell out about £5000 worth of his G. N. T. Railway shares; can he have the money to-day?”

“Certainly, sir, in three hours if he wants it. But to-morrow will probably be a better day, if he can wait, as they expect a rise in all railway stock after to-night’s mail from Paris.”

“I must be in Exeter to-night,” says the Captain.

“Very good, sir; will you wait here, or shall I call anywhere in town with the money?”

“That is my address,” replied the Captain, giving a card to the lawyer; “and I will be there between 1 and 2 P.M., if that will do.”

“Quite so, sir,” said Simmons; “and I will start at once for the city.”

“Glad to see you so well, Thorn,” continues Stoker; “you look younger than ever. But I must say good-bye, as I have a host of commissions.”

Then, once more, Mr. Thorn turned to his work.

In about an hour his head-clerk returned from the city with news that the G. N. T. shares were down even lower than he thought, though they were sure of a rise to-morrow.

“Would it not be better for Captain Stoker to wait till then, sir? It is but a single day.”

“Very true, Simmons; but when a man is in such a hurry as the Captain, with a smart young lieutenant, and an ardent young lady at the other end of his tether, a single day is a long time. What will he gain by waiting?”

“One per cent. at least, sir.”

“That’s a matter of fifty pounds. If it were my own case, I should say wait, but Stoker——”

“Will you allow me to make a suggestion, sir?”

“By all means, Simmons.”

“Well, sir, if you care to make fifty or sixty pounds without a particle of trouble or risk, the simplest plan would be to give the Captain your cheque for five thousand, minus the brokerage, and convert the stock yourself to-morrow morning. It seems a pity that some one should not have the benefit of the rise. I only wish that it was in my own power to buy.”

The lawyer mused for a moment, as if in doubt, but then answered briskly enough—

“Very well, Simmons, so be it. My balance at the bank is not large; but, as you say, it is only till to-morrow. Bring me the cheque-book, and make it out for

£4950, this will leave a good margin for brokerage and office expenses ; and if exceeded, you can charge the balance to the Captain's account."

In five minutes the cheque was signed, and handed by his master to the chief clerk.

"You don't seem well, Simmons," said the lawyer, kindly ; "what is the matter with you? You look all of a shake, and as pale as a ghost, man!"

"The fact is, sir," replied Simmons, "that it was blazing hot in the city this morning, and I rather overdid it in hurrying back to Lincoln's Inn to tell you of this fall. I shall be all right again, sir, directly."

"Take a cab, Simmons, and make the Captain pay for it both ways ; and if you are not better to-morrow morning stay at home, and give yourself a day's rest."

To this, after some reluctance, the old man agreed, with one proviso.

“I must come into town,” he said, “just to finish up this little business of the Captain’s, and pay in your money ; that done, I will, with thanks, sir, take the rest of the day. I have all the necessary papers, and need only trouble you for your keys for one minute to lock up the S S box.”

This part of the business was soon transacted ; Simmons departed in the cab, and once more the lawyer turned to his desk, where many important letters yet waited his answer.

The next day, about noon, Simmons duly appeared, papers in hand, with the news that there had been a rise of $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., as he predicted (and as indeed Thorn had just seen in *The Tearer*) ; that the £4950 had been duly delivered into the Captain’s hands (for which he produced a receipt), and the

lawyer's own monies paid into the bank, —but still looking pale and haggard.

“With your permission, sir,” he said, “I will now take the rest of the day, as you kindly suggested. There,” he added, “is the Captain's receipt for the money.”

“You have earned your holiday well, Simmons; go home at once, and take a thorough good rest.”

Mr. Thorn went back to Barton Villa that night in a very serene and pleasant frame of mind. Without a particle of trouble, further than signing his name to a slip of paper, he had quietly pocketed seventy or eighty pounds, with the additional satisfaction of knowing that no one was the worse for his gain, but that peppery little Captain, who would insist on being in a hurry. Few men in these days of hasting to be rich are free from the *auri sacra fames* that rejoices in any fair, easy, and dexterous

stroke of fortune, and Mr. Thorn was not one of the few.

“My dear,” he said to his wife, “Simmons made a very neat little stroke for me to-day in the market ; we will have a bottle of my best champagne, and drink old Stoker’s health.”

So their little dinner party that evening was a very jovial one ; they ate, drank, and were merry. Nor was old Simmons, the faithful and clever head clerk, forgotten.

“He has been with me just twenty years, Jane,” said the lawyer, as he sipped his coffee ; “and, to the best of my knowledge, has never made a muddle of any one job that I gave him to do ; and for the last ten years I don’t think he has had a week’s holiday. He is about the only good thing that ever came out of Ferret’s office. *Their* tactics he could not endure any longer. No honest fellow could, for that matter.”

The next morning, at Lincoln's Inn, he found this note awaiting him—

“Gaster Buildings.

“DEAR SIR,—I am sorry to say that I am unable to leave my bed this morning, having caught a violent chill in the desperate heat of Tuesday last. I thought it best to send the enclosed certificate of my medical man, who forbids my stirring out to-day.

“I remain, dear Sir,

“Yours truly and obliged,

“R. SIMMONS.”

To this Mr. Thorn sent but one hasty line of answer—

“Pray do not think of coming to Lincoln's Inn until you are quite fit for work, and your doctor authorizes your venturing out.

“J. T.”

Every morning for about a week after this, a short bulletin arrived from Gaster Buildings, still regretting the medical man's refusal to allow his patient to return to work, and thanking Mr. Thorn for his great kindness. But at the end of that time the lawyer, really concerned for his old servant's sad condition, on his way home drove round by Gaster Buildings to inquire in person.

"It was No. 16, I know," he said to the cabman.

"Here it is, sir; and werry tidy lodgings they are too, sir. I often drives a gent from your hoffice to No. 16."

A quiet-looking, well-dressed woman opened the door.

"I have called to ask how Mr. Simmons is, to-night?"

"I only wish I could tell you, sir, how ne is."

“So bad as that, is he?” said the lawyer, kindly.

“I don’t know how bad he may be, but I do know that I have not set eyes on him since yesterday was a week, and he owes me nine weeks’ rent!”

“Good heavens!” exclaimed the lawyer; “I thought he was ill in bed with a doctor attending him!”

“The villain!” replied the woman. “I only wish he *was* in bed! He got me out of the way with some cock-and-bull story about a fire in the next street, where a sister of mine lives, packed his box, and was off before I got back again. But where and why he is gone, God only knows. I have seen the police, and the inspector, and inquired at the cab-stand, but not a scrap of tidings can I get. I hope he ain’t a friend o’ yours, sir.”

And this was all that the bewildered law-

yer could learn that night. The next day brought him further and worse news.

He had no heart to tell his story when he got back to Barton Villa that night, but the next morning he started for Lincoln's Inn as early as Binks could get a cab for him ; determined to learn the worst at once.

It was soon learned. The tin box marked "S. S.," on being opened, was found to contain nothing but two mortgages on some estate of the Captain's near Exeter, every available scrap of parchment and paper that could be turned into money on the Stock Exchange having disappeared.

At the sight of the empty box the lawyer turned very pale, knowing that for every penny of the market value of the contents of that box he was morally and legally responsible, and that the balance against him, exclusive of the five thousand just gone, must be a heavy one.

“The double-faced rascal!” he muttered to himself, “gulling me with his lying bulletins, and I fool enough to believe him; confound his pale, sneaking face!”

Then he went into the outer office, where two clerks were at work.

“Harrison,” he said to the elder of the two, “look sharp and just glance through all Captain Stoker’s account, and let me know what securities we have of his, besides the G. N. T. R. shares we sold out last week.”

In ten minutes the paper was laid on his desk, and Mr. Thorn knew that he was all but a ruined man. The sum total of his loss would not be less, so far as could be estimated, than ten thousand pounds. The savings of a long life of hard work were all but gone at a single blow! Wearily and sadly he leaned his head on his hand, with a cold and deadly chill

about his heart, such as he had never felt in the worst days of the Silver Mines. But he was still sufficiently master of himself to show no sign of his great emotion to his clerks. They would know it all soon enough.

Leaving word that he should return to the office later in the day, he went off to the police station at Barton Green, and stated the whole case to Inspector Polter. But for any comfort he derived from that visit, he might just as well have stayed where he was.

“Eight clear days, you see, sir,” said that intelligent officer. “Time enough to get right away from Liverpool, or to hide away snug down in the country. Uncommon neat little dodge I must say, that of the doctor’s certificate! He must be an old hand.”

“Confound him!” said Thorn, “what could I ever expect but a scoundrel from that

nest of rogues the Ferrets' office! Still, Polter, you may as well go down to Gaster Buildings and hear what the woman at No. 16 says; though I have no money for following him to New York."

Mr. Inspector Polter went forthwith to Gaster Buildings; but he came back as wise as he went, having actually discovered nothing whatever relative to Mr. Simmons, his accomplice, or his present whereabouts.

If he had been a little sharper, he might possibly have found out that Mr. Simmons took the fast train to Liverpool on that fatal Wednesday night, and paid for a steerage passage to New York by a fast boat that sailed the next day. But he would not have found out that Richard Simmons came back to London by the return train the next morning, to his new lodgings in Green Street, Bermondsey; and a companion with him.

The lawyer's next visit was to Dodson's Bank, and ten minutes' talk with the manager in his private room was enough to convince him that he had to begin life again, not indeed as a mere clerk, but without any capital, with nothing, in fact, to rely on but the proceeds of his business.

"I grieve to tell you, my old friend," said the banker, after careful examination of sundry books, "that when the Captain's demands are all paid, the balance in your favour will not be three hundred pounds,—exclusive of course of the five hundred and odd that still stands in your daughter's name."

"Gone long ago!" exclaimed the old man; "gone in those infernal Guaxaras!"

"Yes, yes; I know all about that, my friend, but brought back again by an old client of yours, and still safe in her name—

brought back by Mr. Antony Hastings himself."

And then the whole story had to be told to the amazed lawyer.

"God bless him!" said the old man. "I did not believe it was in him to do such a thing; and never say a word about it too, *that* makes it doubly generous!"

This, in fact, was the one drop of comfort in the old man's bitter cup; and that night at Barton Villa, in telling his sad and terrible story, in spite of all their misery the thought of Antony Hastings' kindly deed touched more hearts than one, and more deeply than the doer of it could have ever hoped.

"It was so done," said the lawyer to his daughter, "that we can, I think, accept the kindness as freely as it was offered."

Amy Thorn had her own view of the matter; but she loved her father too truly

to add to his troubles by anything like strong difference of opinion. All she said was—

“It was a generous thing to do, and it was kindly done; time enough to think of it again, papa, when we have set all your troubles to rights.”

Then the two women talked brightly and cheerily to the weary, anxious father, and comforted him, and made the best of their common misfortune, as only true love can do.

In the quiet of her own room that night, Amy once more thought over the generous gift of Mr. Antony Hastings, and though she fully saw the delicacy and generosity with which he had acted, she also hesitated to place herself under so great an obligation. She felt, in fact, that by doing so she was giving him a position which he had not yet occupied—a right to make a present of

large value. Once admit that right, and it was difficult to say to what future steps a door might not be opened.

And yet, under present circumstances, it was equally difficult to decline what her own father saw no difficulty in accepting. In trying to solve the knotty question, as many another puzzled heroine has done, she fell fast asleep.





CHAPTER II.

CLOUDY DAYS.

“In struggling with misfortune lies the proof
Of virtue.”

SHAKSPEARE.



ARTHUR HELPS, in his charming essay on “Worry,” tells us of brave chieftains among the dusky Indians, who, let misfortune come thickly as it may, bear all in silence and with unwrinkled forehead ; taking every successive blow with a sublime indifference that amounts almost to philosophy. The word worry to them is unknown. But with Mr. Thorn it was a very different matter. Not that he belonged to the class

of “croakers” who enjoy their troubles thrice over — once before they come, by anticipation ; again when they happen, and a third time in groaning over the past ; he was far too strong for such weakness. But he was keenly sensitive both to pleasure and pain, and felt both far more deeply than he appeared to do.

The terrible blow which had befallen his family affected them all deeply and yet differently. On the old man himself it came like a great sorrow, not merely because it involved the loss of many personal comforts—for he was not a selfish man—but because it had undone the work of many long years, and forced him now, in his old age, to begin to climb the hill again, as he had done thirty years before. It brought him down in the world, and placed the firm of “Thorn of Lincoln’s Inn” in a position unworthy of its good name ; and, in addi-

tion to all this, it entailed privation and discomfort on those he loved.

His wife felt the misfortune deeply, but it was mainly on her husband's account. Her own personal comfort and pleasures were both unselfish and moderate ; and as long as she shared his fortunes wherever they befell, she would soon learn to be content. It was *his* sorrow that touched her far more sharply than her own. But on Amy Thorn the blow fell with far greater keenness. She was proud of all the comforts and joys of a well-ordered house, proud of her father's name and position, proud of the power which money brought with it ; she liked spending it, and spent it generously, freely, and with a quiet satisfaction, as being in some sense her right and due by birth. She disliked the thought of a smaller house, fewer servants, and a smaller weekly expenditure ; and on all these grounds she now hated the

name of Simmons with an additional bitterness for all the sufferings he had brought on the father whom she loved so well.

“There is no help for it,” the old man had said; “we must give up Barton Villa, my dear, and take a smaller house at half the rent and less taxes. Binks must go, and you must give up your maid.”

All of which things had to be done, and, thanks once more to Mr. Antony Hastings, were done in the course of the next few months.

He had been one of the first to call at the Villa after their misfortune; and on the whole, nothing could have been pleasanter or better than his tone and temper in dealing with the whole aspect of things as to the past and the future.

He joined the ladies in vigorously denouncing that scoundrel Simmons, and

prophesying a speedy halter for him in New York, to which remote city all agreed that the defaulter had taken his departure ; while he soothed the lawyer's *amour propre* by the unusual quiet and friendliness of his manner. He brought flowers for Mrs. and Miss Thorn from his own garden, as well as from town ; and seemed never so happy as when he was executing commissions for them in London, or chatting to the old man when his day's work was over. To Thorn himself he rarely spoke of his new misfortunes ; but when it was quite settled that Barton Villa was to be given up, he proved that though silent he had not forgotten the office of a friend.

Just at the edge of Barton Green, and close to the Manor House, was a small, compact, well-built house, belonging to the estate and once the residence of the steward in the days of the old Sam Hastings' father ;

and this chanced to fall vacant just as the villa had to be given up.

“I can’t afford to let you have it rent-free,” said Antony, “but you shall have it at half that of the Villa; it is in good repair, and there is a capital garden. The fields beyond, which used to go with the house, I shall let for building, and so make up for the loss of rent. You will be doing me a kindness, you see, by taking the Lodge off my hands; and I shall be sure of a good tenant.”

In less than three months therefore from the date of Mr. Simmons’ disappearance, the migration had been accomplished, the horrors of removal had been undergone, and the family of Thorn had settled down in their new abode at Barton Lodge.

“I shall never forget your kindness, Hastings, about the house; and now, while I thank you for one good turn, let me also

say how deeply I feel your generosity about old Sally's five hundred pounds. I have known it for months past, and have only waited to see if you would mention the subject, and thinking that perhaps you might some day like to tell Amy yourself. But now I can be silent no longer."

"I had fully intended," replied Antony, "some day or other to tell your daughter, as you supposed; but the chance has never yet come, and I would not now add to her troubles the thought that I was trying to gain her favour by the three per cents; though, mind you, the three per cents is no bad thing. But I want no thanks now, Thorn; the money after all was more hers than mine, and I am sure that old Sally would have liked her to have it. Besides," he slowly added, "Miss Amy's happiness is more to me than you imagine. I have never alluded to the sub-

ject before, and should not have done so now but for this chance talk. Do you remember, when I was a boy, how I used to say, if I ever marry, Amy Thorn shall be my wife?"

"Quite well, Hastings; and I thought that it was a boy's fancy, long since dead and buried."

"The boy's fancy has only grown and strengthened into a man's choice. I still say, that if I ever marry, Amy Thorn shall be my wife. What does her father say to this proposal?"

For a moment the old man hesitated. For many a month he had foreseen such a question, but now the day had come he was hardly ready for it. Yet it was necessary to speak at once, and to speak clearly.

"You have my free permission," he replied, "to ask my daughter to be your wife. But I shall say nothing to her on

the subject, either *pro* or *con*, until you have spoken yourself. She is too wise and too good a girl to need a word from me, or not to deserve an absolutely free choice. Choose, therefore, your own time and your own way. All the advice I give is, don't be in too much of a hurry. Choose your time well, when the wind is fair and the sun shines."

"That," answered Hastings, "is all I can possibly ask, and I am well content to bide my time."

The time, however, came sooner than he expected, almost sooner than Antony wished ; for though he really loved Amy as truly as a selfish man ever loves anything but himself, and would have sacrificed even more than he had done to win her favour, he felt in his heart of hearts rather nervous about formally entering the lists. Like many a braver man, though he had fully

made up his mind to speak, he again and again deferred doing so. He did not feel at all sure of his ground, and dreaded to find it slipping away under his feet. His own good sense had warned him not to allude to the subject of old Sally's legacy, and he hardly knew whether Amy was aware of the transfer at the bank or not. But, as the wise man saith, *Time and chance happeneth to all men*, and both befriended Mr. Antony Hastings.

He was now a frequent, welcome, and expected guest at the Lodge, and few days passed without his appearing there under some pretext or other, on his way to or from town, with a present of flowers or fish, or even game, for both partridges and hares were to be had on one of the Manor farms ; and now that he had been shamed out of the slaughter of pigeons, and Punter and Straw were both morally defunct, he was driven to

be content with a day's shooting in which there was a grain or two of something like real sport.

Now at the back of Barton Lodge there was a very pleasant stretch of garden, shaded by tall elm trees that bounded the Manor grounds, and ornamented by an old summerhouse of green trelliswork, where the two ladies often spent their afternoons at work; and into this garden there was a side entrance, of which Antony sometimes availed himself. It was by this that he entered one afternoon, carrying with him a brace of birds, and walking down the garden found Miss Thorn alone in the summerhouse, her mother having been called into the house to receive a visitor.

She rose to shake hands with him very cordially, and with that pleasant smile which had begun to come back again to her face of late, and was one of its greatest charms ;

greeting him, in fact, like an old friend, and beginning at once to talk to him freely on any chance topic that occurred, the brace of birds having been simply laid on the table between them. It was a round table ornamented with fir cones, and the harbour was both cool and clean, which is more than can be said for all rustic retreats of that genus. Amy went on with her work as usual.

“You come laden with good things as usual, Mr. Antony, I see.”

“No great gift,” he replies, “a brace of birds; and where else can I bring them with greater pleasure to myself, or greater certainty of being welcome, though it is such a trifle? The fact is, that you make Barton Lodge so attractive to a poor lonely bachelor that it is hard to keep away. But you have brought a troublesome visitor on yourself by not shutting me out.”

“I don’t know,” she answered, “I don’t know who should have a better right to come here than one to whom we owe so much. You have added years, I think, to my father’s life. In short, if I once begin to thank you for all past and present favours, I hardly know where I shall leave off.”

“Then, never make a beginning,” he answers gaily; “never make a beginning, and you will never be puzzled about leaving off. It will be more than enough reward to me if I have added a day to my old friend’s life, or a grain to his daughter’s happiness in any way.”

“Ah,” she said, looking up brightly from her work, “that reminds me of one great piece of generosity which not only surprised me, but which I had no possible right to expect, and no——”

“Oh! as to that,” he interrupted, “I will

take no credit at all in the matter. The money was far more yours than mine, and if old Sally had ever known the truth about it, your name would have been in the will, instead of Antony Hastings'. Fond as I am of money—and you know how fond I am—I rejoice to think that I may have added a grain to your happiness or comfort!"

His intense earnestness touched the young girl, and she showed it by her looks as well as her words.

"I accept your gift then," she said, "which is a kind and generous one, as freely as you offered it; and if it is a pleasure to you to know it, you may be sure that it will add to the comforts of Barton Lodge, as well as my own."

"Your own happiness, Miss Amy, I repeat, is the chief point with me; it is to you that I offered the gift, and it is your

happiness that adds to mine. I know of no other way of——”

“Stop, stop,” she cried, “don’t be carried away by the mere impulse of the moment, into saying something polite that after all——”

“My dear Miss Amy, it is not in my line at all to grow sentimental and to say merely polite things. I never was more in earnest in my life than when I said that your happiness was mine, and that all I have to give is as freely yours as old Sally’s legacy, if you only would be content to share it.”

He spoke these words very gravely but earnestly ; there was not a flash of passion in all he said, and in a moment, before she could answer, there came back upon her mind that long and passionate pleading of his brother’s, the eager words, the burning looks that had thrilled through her then, and that she had answered lightly ; she had

believed the former ardent words, and they had come to nothing ; was she to disbelieve or accept those which greeted her now ?

Her lover's generosity had really touched her heart ; she measured the intensity of his affection by the price he had paid to prove it, and could not help speaking kindly to him in reply, and giving him as she well knew a word of hope.

“ You are very kind and generous,” she said, “ and mean, I am sure, all that you say. I thank you heartily for all you offer, but it has come suddenly on me, and I must have time to think.”

“ Time ?” he answered eagerly, “ abundant time, as long as ever you can possibly wish for, or expect a poor bachelor to wait ; only remember I am living in darkness till you give me your answer, though I am rejoiced to wait.”

“ So be it,” she replied, “ give me time ;

and meanwhile you will not speak to my father, or take any other step."

"Not a word, Amy, until you give me leave yourself—to him, or to any other mortal."

Then they shook hands warmly, as Mrs. Thorn reappeared on the scene, and begged him to stay to dinner.

"Not such a dinner as in the old Barton Villa days, Mr. Antony, but a plain joint, and a hearty welcome."

He glanced at Amy, as the old lady spoke, but a single look assured him that he had done enough for that day, and had better be content with things as they were. Wisely therefore he took his leave.

Crochet gives as many opportunities for silent thought as for work, and for the next two hours Miss Amy Thorn was so intent on her silk lacework as not to hear more

than one question addressed to her, and to answer several others at random.

“My dear Amy,” said her mother, at last, “what on earth is the matter with you? What has Mr. Hastings been saying to upset you in this fashion? No more bad news, I hope.”

“Not a word, mamma. Most people would call it rather good news, I suppose. Mr. Hastings has told me that he likes me better than any other lady of his acquaintance—better than even him——”

“My dear, he never said that, I’m sure; he’s too much of a gentleman.”

“Something very much like it, then, mamma; and on the whole I rather took it as a compliment.”

“And what answer did you give him, Amy?”

“Well, mamma, he seemed more anxious to expound his affection and preference for

me than to have an explicit answer at once. So I did not say very much in reply. I told him, 'I must have plenty of time to think.' I could not answer him, in fact, until I had thought it over, and seen papa as well as you. Was I wrong in doing this?"

"No, I think not, if you really care at all for him ; and your father is sure to have plenty of good advice to give you. You must speak to him to-night, after dinner."

But that night Mr. Thorn brought a friend home with him to taste that friendly slice of mutton, and a glass of sherry, which really now was all the dinner at Barton Lodge, and it was not until the following evening that she had the chance of telling him what had happened.

Then, after dinner, while the lawyer was smoking his cigar in that same summer-house which had been the scene of the

declaration, his daughter told him what had happened.

“My child,” said the old man, “it’s a difficult matter to advise any one about, even my own daughter, until I know whether you really care for the gentleman or not. There is much to be said in his favour, and not much against him. But the whole decision is in your own hands and you must give him his answer. The only question is, as I said, whether you care for him or not?”

“Care for,” she answered, “is a wide phrase. He has been very kind and generous to you, and has helped us all very much, and I really feel grateful to him, and in some things I really like him ; but as for any grand passion, papa, I am getting too old, I suppose, to entertain it for any one I have ever yet seen.”

“My dear Amy, you count him kind and

generous, and you have a sort of liking for him ; I don't know a better foundation for deeper feeling and true love. He will make you a good husband, and put you in your true position again as a lady ; while to me, Amy, it will be an unspeakable comfort to know that you are so happily provided for. I am getting old, Amy, and work is beginning to tell on me. But, as I said before, the matter is wholly in your own hands. Give me a kiss, my child, before you go, and then be off to talk it all over with mamma."

Mrs. Thorn had been duly instructed by her husband as to what cards she was to play, and to take care how she played them. Her trump card was to listen, and this she played with considerable skill.

That night the lawyer sent a short note over to the Manor House, which was to Mr. Antony Hastings the cause of no small satisfaction. Thus it ran :

“MY DEAR HASTINGS.—Come and see us as usual. But don’t allude to your last conversation with my daughter, and above all, don’t be in a hurry with her.

“Always yours,

“J. T.”

On this advice Antony acted with great care, and the result was that before the partridge shooting was over, he was the accepted suitor of Miss Amy Thorn, and already beginning to plan many things for her advent to the Manor House. He had played his cards well indeed, so he thought, and was serenely content. His future wife was a beautiful and accomplished woman, and if she was not well dowried, and cherished no very romantic passion for him at present, both love and wealth might come all in good time, and so he was more than content. Half his time was spent at

the Lodge, and he was really learning to make himself agreeable and devoted to his friends' comfort. He seemed never weary of anticipating Amy's wishes, of kind offices for Mrs. Thorn, and friendly attention to his old friend the lawyer. There was but one fly in Antony's pot of ointment, and that was the thought of his brother Gerald at Cogsford; what he would say, and what he would do, when he heard of the intended marriage. Some fool or other is sure to tell him of it, argued the Lord of the Manor, and then he will come rushing up to town, and a pretty scene we shall have of it at the Lodge.

For a time he debated with himself whether he should not go down to Cogsford, and be the bearer of the news in person; but in truth, he really feared to encounter his brother. Then he thought of writing; but even this was too much for him, and

he determined at last to let matters take their chance.

If Gerald really cared for her why didn't he come up to town himself and tell her so? No girl can wait for ever. And then he thought with shame and bitterness of the letter he had intercepted and read—and its few words of tender, earnest, passion. But it was too late to draw back now, and things must take their course.

Things did take their course, and early in the January of the new year—*Antony Hastings, of Barton Manor, Esq., and Amy Thorn, daughter of J. Thorn, Esq., of Lincoln's Inn*, became man and wife. So said the *Times* newspaper, and carried the intelligence far and wide over the world, but not into the remote village of Cogsford, Lincolnshire, where *The Daily Tearer* was the only organ of news, and where Gerald Hastings, all unconscious of what had happened,

steadily worked on at his engineering, laying by many guineas, and acquiring much fame as the junior partner in the house of Messrs. Driver.

Another year's good hard work, he was saying to himself, only one year more, and I shall start for Barton Villa. She will find that I have kept my word, and never mean to give her up till she herself bids me. By the way, I must write to my worthy elder brother, the Lord of the Manor; his last letter was dated some months back, and I don't think I ever answered it. I recollect, too, it was full of chaff about the lovely Grace, and my dear friend the Yankee artist.



CHAPTER III.

LIFE AT BARTON MANOR HOUSE.

“Within the narrow circle of each life,
There is a world.”

PENDARVES.



THE months were passing rapidly away, and Spring with living hand had begun to breathe new life even over the grimy, dusty gardens round London. The old Manor House already showed many signs of change, change in the very aspect and tone of the rooms, of the furniture, and the books; in the garden, among the flowers, and under the green elms. Everywhere was apparent some trace of womanly taste and care; and

even the Lord of the Manor himself was silently undergoing a similar metamorphosis. He was quieter, far better dressed, and thought neither so intensely nor so often of himself alone. He probably loved his wife as well as he ever could have loved any woman; being utterly incapable of feeling or rousing the higher passion of love in its true sense. But he was very obedient to old Sally's dying words—and was very "kind to her;" and, as yet, even generous to her in all matters of house-keeping. He took pleasure in pleasing her in many ways, and these, though for the most part trifling, and kindling no romantic affection, gradually won her regard. Besides this, he was wise enough to make much of her father and mother as welcome guests at the Manor House (for both had been kind and true friends to him)—and so the wheels of life, being fairly oiled, rolled

smoothly on, as far as any outsider could judge.

As to Amy herself, the great trial had been in accepting Antony Hastings as her husband at all. But having once made up her mind to do so, and having fought the battle, she was far too proud to show by any outward sign how hard the struggle had been. The great idea of her younger days had been to marry a man of intellect at least equal if not superior to her own : an ambitious man, who should never be content to play second fiddle, or hold a second place, when he could play or hold first ; who would win a position of some note among the men of the day, and be proud of it, and of her whom he had asked to share it.

Among all her acquaintances and friends she had never yet met with one who seemed to come up to this mark. The Curate of

St. Patrick's was clever enough in his way, but he was a crotchety man, and would never get out of his groove, however brilliant or amusing he might be in it. Gerald Hastings was the first that ever struck her with a sense of true power, of tenderness, and of ambition united. But he was young and unformed, and even when he made his passionate offer, scarcely enough her superior to command success with her heart, or with the world. He was very pleasing to her at times; but he showed a sign of weakness in suing where he should have boldly stepped in and conquered. Hence her hesitation at the last; hence that willing unwillingness to meet his offer with a definite answer.

But all this was over now. The dream she had cherished was past. The man whom she had married would never be greater, or much better, or much other

than he now was. The map of her life, as she thought, lay pretty clearly unfolded before her ; and she did her best to try and be contented with it. At times she succeeded ; but now and then there came cloudy days, when it was painful to look forward and useless to look back. Then she wisely determined to find happiness in such work as came within daily reach ; in her books, in the garden, among the flowers, and in several grimy districts in the parish of St. Patrick's where weeds were far more abundant than flowers.

To this district-visiting Antony at first made several objections, but he gave way at last, as he usually did to his wife's special views, with one characteristic proviso.

“ Well, well, Amy,” he said, “ go and hunt up all these poor creatures that you tell of, (though I don't see the exact use of it)—all I bargain for is—no fevers or in-

fectious disorders to be brought to the Manor House. It would not do for you, Amy, and I am sure it would not suit me."

And so, by degrees, she settled down into a quiet routine of regular work, and made herself as happy as she could. Yet through it all there now and then lingered a faint touch of regret for the blighted hopes of the past, and of wonder that Gerald could ever have become so false to his own burning words. Then her pride came to the rescue, and once more she determined that such falseness was utterly unworthy of a thought, that she never had cared, or could care, for such a man. Some day he should find this out.

As for Antony, but one trouble rose up out of the cloudy past to sting him—the thought of how Gerald would receive the news of Amy's marriage, and listen to his

defence as to how it came to pass. Sooner or later, as he well knew, the news must reach him.

Gerald had more than once spoken of coming to town for a day or two, and he himself had even thought of paying a visit to Cogsford, but when the time came his courage always failed him; and he once more trusted that the future would open some way of escape, and that delay which promises so much (to the coward) would in some way befriend him.

In this state of affairs, all at once there came tidings from Lincolnshire which seemed to do more than fulfil this hope.

Gerald wrote to say—in a few feeble lines—that he had been ill, having caught some kind of low fever in a piece of marshy ground that was being drained by the engineers, and had been laid up for nearly two months.

“I would not let Tom Driver write for me,” he said, “nor could I write myself until to-day, when my doctor gives me leave, and orders me off for a month or six weeks to the seaside. It seems an age since I heard of, or from you. How is Barton Manor House?—and how is the Lord of the Manor? *Remember me kindly to the Thorns, when you see them. Any tidings of them will always be most welcome.*”

It so chanced that some friends were dining with them that day, and Antony at dinner told them all of the news he had received.

“I am very sorry to hear of it, Hastings,” said old Thorn; “be sure and say so when you write, and wish your brother all sorts of good things at the seaside for me, and for all of us, I am sure.”

“You will go down and see him, of course,” interrupts Mrs. Thorn, “seeing is

so much better than writing. And give my love to him, Antony, and tell him that I have not forgotten the night of the fire, whatever Amy may have done."

"I have not forgotten it, nor am I ever likely to forget it," replied the young lady; "as, I think, Mr. Gerald was very well aware—when I last saw him. Of course you *will* go, Antony, and see your brother; you have been talking of going to see him for months past."

"Of course," replied her husband, "of course I should go directly, but that Gerald was to start at once for the seaside; and as he does not say where, it is impossible for me to pay him a visit and not easy to write, though the 'Drivers' will of course forward all letters."

"You must write at once, then, and say how sorry we all are, Antony."

And so the matter ended for the time, and

the talk flowed away into other channels ; the master of the house well content that he had escaped so well. But the fates had not done with him yet. Presently the ladies retired, and chairs were drawn up to the top of the table nearer to the host's own quarters.

“ For my part, Hastings,” said the Curate of St. Patrick's, “ I always thought Mr. Gerald was to be the happy man.”

“ Perhaps he is to be,” remarked a little fellow named Perkins, who sometimes made one small joke in the course of an evening, and lived on it for weeks ; “ perhaps he is to be the happy man yet.”

But, somehow or other, this unhappy jokelet fell flat on the company, and even the host, who was bound to laugh, did so without a particle of approval in his voice. It was like the firing of a boy's gun charged with powder only, and Mr. Perkins shrank

into his shoes, which luckily were large. But the good-natured curate tried to come to the rescue.

“I certainly should have backed Mr. Gerald,” he said, “as the winning horse ; but there is no accounting for ladies’ tastes, and the favourite never wins in these days. Be sure and tell him, however, me friend, what a loss he has had. Tell him from me, I beg, that charming as Miss Amy Thorn always was, Mrs. Antony is more charming still. And with your leave, gentlemen, we will all drink her health in a glass of this good claret.”

The claret was drunk with much enthusiasm, and then the conversation broke up into several new channels, not thoroughly recovering its brightness, however, till the gentlemen reached the drawing-room, where that most unfailing of all fruitful topics, High Church and Low Church-*ism*, was

being fervently discussed. Miss Satchell, who had a nephew in Islington that was "a gospel curate," she said, and mighty at Exeter Hall against the Pope, Dr. Pusey, and all the horrors of Ritualism, was contending fiercely with Mrs. Antony, as they entered the room.

"Ah, here comes Mr. Dunster; now I can appeal to him as a minister of the Gospel with safety—can't I, Mr. Dunster?"

"By all means, me dear madam, though it's hard to say exactly what the Gospel is, and what it is not, just at present; what with High Church and Low Church, and Broad Church, and Exeter Hall Church, and Spurgeonism rampant among the Bishops themselves."

"But it's these dreadful Ritualists," went on the old lady, "and all their Romanizing antics, and their red gowns and white gowns, and candles, and little boys in smock-frocks,

and flower-pots and incense-pots, and crosses, and falling down before the Scarlet Lady, that Miss Amy—I beg her pardon, Mrs. Hastings, and I were speaking of.”

“Me dear friend,” replied St. Patrick, “you will never get right till you hear what Tickler has to say about these things. Only two parsons in fifty-one know their own mind, and only one of the two decides according to the evidence before him. The other forty-nine are either afraid to speak out what they really think, or else are just led by the nose into any set of doctrines and dresses that the noisiest and strongest of their disciples think proper to choose for them. Tickler’s plan is the only cure for all this, Thorn, and I give it to you gratis, as a hint for you City men when you’re getting up a new company again. It is to be called the “Patent Clerical Company,” and to supply Curates of every age, height, ugliness

or beauty, and every grade of orthodoxy that the most fastidious of the ‘T. P.,’* or the most exacting of rectors can possibly require. Here the needy patron will be able at once to procure an aged minister warranted to live not more than a year, and thus enable him to sell his presentation at the greatest advantage; and here there will be always on hand a large stock of young gentlemen in Noah’s Ark coats and ‘M. B.’ waistcoats; of gentlemen to whom salary is no object, as they are only seeking for a sphere of usefulness; and of those who, having laboured long in the vineyard, think that such exemplary diligence——”

“My dear Dunster,” said the old lawyer, with a hearty laugh, “your prospectus is too long. The idea is good, but you must put

* T. P.—*i.e.*, “*Truly Pious*,” a sacred title which a certain small sect of Pharisees have appropriated as their own.

it into smaller space. And I don't see what in the world beauty or ugliness has to do with the matter."

"Me dear sir, look into the *Gospel Harbinger*, and you will see that it has much to do. Here's an advertisement from last week's paper:—

" ' An evangelical vicar in the Midland Counties is in want of a young man of decided piety. Plainness of personal appearance no disadvantage, if accompanied by views in strict accordance with, &c., &c., as his work will lie entirely among the poorer classes. Stipend, with a title, 40*l.* per annum.' "

"Exactly what I used to give Binks, my old butler, who, by the way, has just got 80*l.* in his new place."

"But now," continued Dunster, "now

comes the essence of the new company. They will employ travellers to go all over England with samples of their goods."

"Samples of Curates?" cried Antony; "what on earth do you mean, Dunster?"

"Just what I say—little wooden dolls, each dressed, ticketed, numbered, and answering in every respect to its description in the catalogue; here (taking a paper out of his pocket), are a few examples:—

"'No. 15. Tall; well made; gentlemanly; close-shaven; views, High Church; able to intone; Hymns, Ancient and Modern; fluent preacher; celibate. Salary, 120*l*.'

"Or 'No. 16. The same as foregoing, but married, with large family, and some private property. Salary, 150*l*.'

"Or 'No. 20. Unexceptionable as to character, and personal appearance; hair parted in the middle; preaches extempore; views in

strict accordance with the everlasting Gospel ; wishes for a sole charge, and extended sphere of usefulness.'

"Or ' No. 21. A Catholic priest, who uses the Little Prayer Book, and is a member of the A. P. U. C. ; wears his beard and moustache, but is willing to adopt the tonsure ; at least two daily celebrations.'

"Tickler gives fifty varieties of these ecclesiastical models, with rules for the construction of fifty more, so as to embrace every possible variety of opinion and practice in our National Church. Now, Thorn, what do you think of the scheme ?"

"Think, my dear St. Patrick ? I think that you ought be appointed 'Pontifex Maximus' to the company, at a thousand a year. It would be the most popular company under the sun, if you could only get it to work ; and Spurgeon and all his crew of

hungry malcontents would go mad for joy if you did. But, joking apart, the poor old Church of England's back seems all but broken at last, and every sort of mongrel doctrine and practice just now practicable if only it does not agree with the strict letter of the Prayer Book—*i.e.*, with the standing orders of the clergy to which they have sworn obedience. *That*, indeed, seems to be just the one thing which the Bishops will not tolerate."

"Papa! papa!" cried a well-known voice, "I will not have any more theological battles fought in my drawing-room; so come here, and have some coffee."

"By all means, Amy. I have been dying for coffee for the last half hour, but this thirsty curate here would not leave your husband's excellent claret till the last moment, and so now he drags me into these Exeter Hall fireworks. I have only

one word more to say to him, and then Miss Satchell shall reply on the whole question."

And with a sly look at the curate he added, "I tell you what it is, Dunster: I believe that a man might preach the Gospel according to Tickler at church every Sunday of his life without being pulled up, if he only ended with abusing the abominations of Rome, and the kindred horrors of Baptismal Regeneration. Here is this new man just come to the District Church on the hill; I hear that he is giving a course of lectures on the improprieties and errors of the Baptismal and Burial Services in his own Prayer Book! Is it true, Miss Satchell? He is close to you; no doubt you know all about him?"

"Oh, my dear Mr. Thorn, I have been to hear him twice; he is the most heavenly-minded young man that ever——"

“There!” shouted the lawyer, “there, you see, it’s all true; and this heavenly-minded young man, having just sworn that he firmly believes certain Christian doctrines and will teach them *totis viribus* to his people, deliberately sets to work at undermining their faith in those very things which he has——”

But at this crowning point of his denunciation the lawyer was suddenly checkmated by finding a pair of neat and dainty hands passed cleverly across his mouth, and all further eloquence stopped.

“Mr. Thorn and Mr. Dunster,” said their owner, “on pain of my severe displeasure I command you to stay these knotty questions forthwith, and drink your coffee. Miss Satchell shall not reply to any such abominable things; but instead, she shall tell me how my two street Arabs are getting on, that I sent to her the other day out of Barton’s Rents.”

“ Oh ! Tom and Dick ? ” replied the old lady. “ My dear Mrs. Hastings, for the first day or two they were both rather troublesome, I must say. I wanted them to do weeding in the garden, you know, under old Sam Grinder. ‘ Now, boys,’ said I, ‘ if you work hard, and get up a good pile of weeds, you are to have sixpence a day each of you, and at four o’clock you may go, and I shall give you half an apple apiece as a reward ! ’

“ ‘ Werry much obliged to you m’, ’ says Tom, ‘ I’m sure ; but us can eat a whole ’un. ’ ”

“ And if you believe me, my dear Mrs. Hastings, they not only ate a whole ’un, each of them, but while old Grinder was at work trimming the ivy, they crept up behind him, and picked his pocket of a couple of ribstones he had kept (for the house, he says) and a large slice of bread

and cheese, and without his knowing there was a creature near him."

"The young villains!" exclaimed the lawyer. "What next?"

"My dear sir, you may well say, 'villains.' The next day it was worse than ever. They were so horribly rude to Titus that——"

"I beg your pardon," said Mrs. Thorn; "rude to whom did you say?"

"To Titus—my dear friend—Titus, my old favourite poodle dog. You will hardly believe it when I tell you that while Grinder went to get his lunch, these two scapegraces coaxed that dear good-natured old pet into a corner of the greenhouse by tempting him with some horrible liver that they brought with them; and there, with the garden-shears, they shaved his dear back and stomach quite bare, leaving only one long tuft of hair at the end of his nose,

on the top of his head, and at the tip of his tail.



“Next, my dear, they managed to tie him up in an old newspaper, daubed over with stripes of some green paint that Grinder was using for the garden-palings; and then at last Titus broke away from them, tore into the house, rushed upstairs into the drawing-room like a half-frantic creature, howling and tearing round the room, driving me half wild with fright. All I could do was to jump up upon a chair and scream for help. I declared, of course, that I would send for the police, and give

them into custody for cruelty to animals, but they——”

But here the further history of Tom and Dick was suddenly interrupted by a servant, who brought a message to Mr. Antony Hastings, that a strange, rough-looking sailor fellow was in the hall asking for Mr. Thorn; that he insisted on seeing him, though told that Mr. Thorn was specially engaged.

“He says his name is Lorimer, I think, sir.”

“Don’t go down, Thorn,” said the host; “it’s only some rascally tramp.”

“Lorimer, Lorimer!” repeated the lawyer, “I don’t remember the name. But yet, I think I had better see the man for a moment.”

Down, therefore, the lawyer went, and having called Mr. Lorimer into the study, remained there for a long half hour—look-

ing pale, sad, and anxious when he returned, but saying not a word further than—

“Very sorry to have left you so long, Amy, but it was special business and I could not avoid it.”





CHAPTER IV.

DULCIS OTIA QUIETIS.

“The grass hath time to grow
In meadow lands, and leisurely the opal sea
Breaks on the tawny sand.”

FRASER.



LINCOLNSHIRE is a dull, flat country, as all who know it will admit, and Cogsford is one of the dullest and flattest spots in Lincolnshire. The change therefore from the hard monotony of an isolated country village and the strictly virtuous propriety of Georgiana, at Minerva House (as he had christened it), to the bustle and endless variety of life at Easton, a fashionable watering-

place on the Yorkshire coast, was to Gerald both sharp and pleasant. It acted like a tonic on him at once, and braced up both mind and body against the dregs of the low fever which still hung about him. The Gorgon Hotel made up a hundred and fifty beds every night, and one of that number was devoted to Mr. G. Hastings; yet, though suddenly thus pitchforked into the middle of a host of strangers, he soon found, both at breakfast and dinner, more than one pleasant companion, and managed to spend his time, as well as many guineas, pleasantly enough. It was an inexpressible comfort to have escaped from Minerva House, from the bondage of being continually asked "if he found anything uncomfortable; of its being hoped that he wasn't worse; that if there was anything more that could be done, he would mention it;" or wondered "why he could not eat some

of that delicious arrowroot, or beef tea, which had been made *expressly* for him ; or drink some of the barley-water which Georgiana had heard that he liked, and was therefore so glad to have prepared for him with her own hands, in that Patent Invalid's Saucepan which she had just got down for him from town."

He could now eat and drink what he liked, and when he liked, and where he liked, without being asked a single question ; or he could decline to take any nourishment whatever if he thought fit. He went where he pleased, though it was but a feeble walk down to the beach ; lay in bed, got up, was busy or idle, just as he pleased, without a single inquiry as to his reasons, or the expression of a shadow of sorrow that he wasn't well, and didn't relish his breakfast, or had some other secret cause of discomfort. Whatever he

wanted, he had but to touch the bell, and the genius of the magic *ring* at once obeyed his command. If he cared to pay for it, there was no one delicate or rare dainty under the sun that he could not at once summon to his call. He hardly knew at first how great this freedom was, or how much he rejoiced in it; but very soon its effects began to show themselves in giving tone, health, and strength to the sick man where he most needed them. He began to get better, and once more to thirst for work. But his doctor had strictly enforced idleness, and Gerald accordingly spent many days and many hours in wandering along the margin of the sounding sea, and in musing many things.

Among others, he mused on a short note received a few days before from his brother Antony, in which the writer said, "I should have run down to see you at

once, had I known whereabouts on the sea-coast you were to be found ; but now I only write these few words (*viâ* Cogsford) to ask for your address, and tell you how grieved we all are to hear of your illness. The Thorns beg to be specially remembered, and send all sorts of kind messages to you. Make haste and get well ; but don't hurry back to work."

"Just like Antony," he said to himself. "He may talk of coming to see me, but will stay in town for all that."

Work was strictly forbidden, and Gerald was unwillingly obliged to be content with idleness, as he told his brother in reply to his note.

He might smoke, or read a novel, or amuse himself with a game of billiards, or indulge in a friendly chat as much as he pleased in moderation, so said Æsculapius,

all which prescriptions he carefully obeyed. There were hundreds of other idlers there besides himself, all on the look out to be amused, and if these did not amuse him, he could easily find a quiet solitude for himself on the cliff, or in some cool retreat among the rocks at their foot. One particular corner among the rocks was a great favourite, and there he spent many a happy hour in reading, thinking over the past, and planning for the future, as the sun went down in the calm summer twilight amid grey and purple clouds. Here he often thought of his kindly friends the Cliffords, who were away on another sketching tour, but had promised to pay him a visit at Easton : and here, above all, he built glorious and golden castles in the air for her he loved, a bright and happy future in which nothing he could win or work for would be too gracious or too good for her

who had inspired all his toil and his happy dreams.

He could tell no one of this special happiness among his chance acquaintance at Easton, of course; and so was driven more and more to take pleasure in lonely communing with the waves and winds, and then naturally enough in scribbling verses in honour of his idol, and more than one such sonnet as Antony had once laughingly suggested to him. His was a mind which essentially lived upon the past, and loved to regild its happy memories, as may be seen from a glance at some desultory, half melancholy lines which he began to scribble at this time, commencing thus—

DREAMLAND.

“ My soul hath a summer garden
Along by the quiet sea :
A garden alive with flowers,
Planted only for me.

Pale amaranth there and asphodel
With perfume crown the night
And flowers with many a silver bell,
Whose blossoms love the light,
Shine out beneath the silver moon,
And open at her starry noon,
As daisies wake when golden dawn
Peeps o'er the eastern hills.
There many a soft and grassy lawn——”

Thus far he had got, one quiet afternoon among the rocks, and was in fact very intent in searching for a good rhyme to “hills”, when the messenger belonging to the Gorgon Hotel suddenly appeared in the winding path leading down to the rock on which the poet sat, and touching his hat as he came up, said—

“Beg your pardon, sir, but there’s a gent inquiring for you down at the Gorgon, and ’s bin there two hours or more, and says it’s uncommon partickler, and he must see you afore the mail-train goes out to-night; name of Lorimer, I think, sir.”

“What name?” replies Gerald, “Lorimer? I don’t know any such person. Is he a gentleman, or does he look like a beggar?”

“Well, sir, the party ain’t a gentleman, that’s certain; nor I don’t think he’s a tramp; I’ve bin two years in town, you see, afore I come to the Gorgon, and so I knows the purfessional pretty well. No, no, he ain’t that kind; he seems rather like a young sailorish chap down on his luck, and hard up for a week’s lodging. But he’d got your name so pat, you see, sir, that I thought I’d better run down and let you know he was waitin’.”

“Very good, John, the mail train does not go out for two hours yet; go back and tell Mr. Lorimer I will see him in less than twenty minutes from this time.”

When Gerald got back to the Gorgon, he found Mr. Lorimer waiting for him in the

visitors' room, and fairly answering to John's description. He was sitting in a corner of the room with his straw hat on, but at once rose and took it off as Gerald entered. He had rather a weather-beaten, sickly look, and was dressed in a rough, faded suit of dark blue, which, like its owner, had seen better days; and was whistling softly to himself.

"Sit down," said Gerald; "you wished to see me, I understand, on special business. You are an utter stranger to me, but if you will tell me your name and business, I am ready to hear what you have to say."

Then the two men sat down, and calmly looked at each other with keen, inquiring eyes.

"My name," said the man, "is Lorimer, as I suppose the 'slavey' told you; and I guess that when you hear what I have to say, you won't think your time wasted.

You are a deal civiller, too, than that lawyer fellow I saw in town last week; and you're right there. Now I've told you my name, I guess yours is Hastings, and ——”

“Quite right, so far,” interrupted his listener.

“Are you Gerald Hastings, son of old Sam Hastings of Barton Manor?”

“Right again; but I can't see what on earth this has to do with your business.”

“Don't be in a hurry, sir, and it will be clear enough presently. You're Gerald Hastings, are you? Well, I've seen your brother Antony, and a nasty uncivil fellow he was, though I got your address out of him at last.”

“And did you come all the way down to Easton merely for the purpose of abusing my relations?” inquired Gerald rather warmly, rising as he spoke. “Because if

you did, though it may serve you to waste your own time, it's hardly worth wasting mine about."

"Stop, stop, man," interrupted the stranger; "your name is Gerald Hastings, and I have something more to say to you than that. My name is Lorimer, Bill Lorimer, and my mother was your father's only sister, who married old Jack Lorimer of Barton Fields just five and thirty years ago——"

"Possibly," interrupted Gerald, "possibly; but what has all this to do with me? The name of Lorimer, I fancy I have heard years and years ago, when a mere boy, but the only child of the persons you name died in the West Indies of yellow fever, so I have always heard."

"Wrong, Captain, out in your reckoning there; took the fever, but never died; knocked about for a dozen years or more,

and then turned up again, and has now come pelting down all this darned way to see you."

Amused at the man's coolness, Gerald merely smiled, and said quietly enough—

"And now, Mr. Lorimer, that you have seen me, are you satisfied?"

"Not quite, not quite. It's my turn to ask a question or two. Did you ever hear your father mention his sister's son, your cousin, Bill Lorimer, as his nearest and only relation?"

"I was away from home for many years," replied Gerald, "but if there a hundred times as much as I was, I don't see how a nephew can be a nearer relation than a man's own sons?"

"Just what that old prig of a lawyer said, when he'd heard my story; but in two minutes I'll show you how it's true for all that; though your grand swell of a

brother called me a tramp, and warned me off the grounds, and his proud minx of a wife——”

“Wife?” cried Gerald, starting up in sudden surprise as he spoke. “He has no wife, he is not married. Mr. William Lorimer, I have thought you were an impostor any time for the last five minutes, but now I am sure of it, and the sooner you leave this room the better. Go at once!” he added, pointing to the door.

“Oh! that’s the line is it?” retorted the other, “I’m a tramp again, am I? Well, tramp or no tramp, I don’t go until I have said what I came to say. I am your father’s lawful nephew, his nearest relation, and by his Will come in for the whole property, Barton Manor and all; and if you don’t listen to me in time, by G—d you shall smart for it all the worse. Do you see now?”

“I see,” replied Gerald, “that you are either mad or drunk, or both, and as to my father’s Will, you have never seen it, or you would not talk such idle rant to me; for you would know that the whole of his property was left to his two children.”

“I do know it, Mr. Gerald Hastings, perfectly well; but for all that Barton Manor is mine, and if I claim it the law will give it to me. Did such a clever young man as you never hear of children, who, though their own father’s sons, could not inherit a scrap of his property?—sons born on the wrong side of the blanket, man?”

But this was more than Gerald Hastings could bear. Rushing hastily to the door and opening it wide, he angrily exclaimed—

“Once more I tell you that you are a rascally impostor, as my brother rightly called you. Leave this room instant, or

I send for a policeman. Take your pack of infamous lies to some other market, here they are useless. Go, I say, at once."

Then Mr. Lorimer put on his hat again and walked coolly out of the room, growling out as he went—

"Now, mind you, Mr. Gerald Hastings, I came to offer you good terms; share and share alike in the old man's money. But as you choose to play the swell, and talk of police, I'll have the uttermost farthing out of you both."

And with these words he stalked angrily across the spacious hall of the Gorgon, passed through its lofty doors, which the porter in full uniform opened wide for him, and went down the steps, shaking his fist idly at the man as he descended; but still whistling softly as he went.

"Porter," said Gerald, "if that fellow comes here again give him in charge of the

police as a tramp and an impostor, and I will appear against him."

But no sooner was the impostor gone than Gerald began to think over his recent conversation, not without some strong feelings of doubt and surprise as to the strange words to which he had just listened. In spite of all he could do against it the impression still clung to him that, though an impostor, Mr. Lorimer might nevertheless have mixed some truth with his lies. Two questions occurred again and again :

Could it by any possibility be true that no marriage had ever taken place between his father and mother ?

Was Antony Hastings married, as that impostor asserted him to be ?

These two points he debated with eager, restless impatience all that evening, and after some hours of broken sleep at night he dreamed of them once more, and woke

in the morning still pursued by the same idle perplexities.

On his breakfast table were several letters, and among them two that turned all his thoughts into the same troublesome channel more fiercely than ever. The first was from his brother, and from it he gathered that a part at least of Mr. Lorimer's story was not false. It was short, and ended thus—

“I am glad to hear that you are still at the seaside. Rest and oxygen are what you want, though not so pleasant I dare say as coining guineas at Cogsford. But don't be in a hurry to get to work again, as I said in my last, and as all your friends here advise. By the way, an odd thing happened here the other night. Thorn was dining with me, when a fellow came to the door and asked to see him, said his name was Lorimer; but to make a long story

short, pretended that he was a cousin of ours and heir to the whole of the Barton property, *we* being, as Thorn afterwards told me, illegitimate. Of course T. treated the whole business as a pack of humbug at the time, but I am to hear more in Lincoln's Inn to-day, and will write again, if need be. The next day the fellow called on me, with the same cock-and-bull story, I suppose; and I warned him off the house, as a tramp."

But even this stray mention of the matter did not at all help to set Gerald's mind at rest; while letter No. 2 added fresh fuel to the fire already beginning to break out into a flame. It was written on a dirty half sheet of letter paper, dated North Street, Easton, and in a rough, irregular, hand. We must copy it entire, and verbatim.

“SIR,—Before I leave this, I will give you one more chance. All I said last night was true. You and your brother are the illegitimate sons of my uncle, old Sam Hastings, who has other children, girls, living at Watford; and I have seen them, so I ought to know. Your father and mother were never married. If you choose to treat me well, and not cut up rough, I don’t mind coming to terms with you. If not, I’ll have every penny the law will give me. Waiting your reply till the mail train at 10 A.M.

“I am yours, &c.,

“W. LORIMER.”

Gerald’s first impulse after reading this was to throw it into the fire, and trouble his head no more about the matter. But before he was half through his breakfast the combined effect of the two letters was

such that he resolved to act upon them in a way not in the least expected by the writer of either.

“Bring me my bill,” he said to the waiter, “and have a cab ready to take me to the express train at ten. I am going to town, and may not be back to-night. I will pack my own bag, and my other luggage may remain here.”

Gerald caught the express train, but saw nothing of his friend Mr. Lorimer, either at starting or when he reached King’s Cross. The journey, though short, was hot and wearisome, and our traveller was glad enough when it was over. His sole companion was a short thin hatchet-faced man, with a sad melancholy expression that betokened the presence of much anxious trouble of some kind or other, and it soon became apparent what the trouble was. There had been a terrible collision during the previous

week in a neighbouring tunnel, and the little man was in a fever of anxiety as to the chance of reaching his journey's end in safety. In spite of Gerald's obstinate silence and costive replies when forced into conversation, he steadily persisted in discussing the whole theory of railway accidents, and boring his companion with endless questions as to the various odds of safety and danger, railway compensation, and the value of insurance tickets.

"I always insure my life now," said the little man at last; "for the only time I omitted to do so of course there was a smash; I was pitched up against the door and had my arm broken. That cost the railway people £50, but I must say it was dear at the price."

"Dear to you, or to the railway?"

"Oh, dear to me; you see I wouldn't employ a lawyer, but pleaded my own case.

I thought I knew how to tickle a jury, but I didn't; and the consequence was, that they said I seemed to be in such good health, and had such a strong voice, that there couldn't be much the matter with my arm, and so they only gave me fifty pounds; and then I got into a mess with a lot of witnesses who were never called or wanted, and I had to pay them. So now I always insure, and sit in the middle of the carriage, opposite, if possible, to a good stout man. Those are *the two* things on which you may depend; not that I undervalue the power of prayer. What do you think of prayer now?"

"Pardon me," replied Gerald, "I don't quite see the drift of your question about prayer, or its connexion with insurance tickets."

"Ah, then you have not seen Gudgeon's tract on 'Spiritual Insurance;' for my part

I don't see how Providence can be called upon to interfere on every occasion, and make up for the carelessness or stingy neglect of railway directors."

"Now," said Gerald, "I quite understand you. You want to know whether trust in God is as good an investment as a sixpenny ticket. Well, I have travelled some thousands of miles all over England, and have never yet met with a railway accident. But I honestly confess that I always commend myself into God's hands when the train starts."

"I see," replies his companion, "you have been always lucky enough to pitch upon a safe train, one that has never come to grief. It's only a question of trains then, after all."

"From your point of view, not from mine. Even if I get into a train that is going to be smashed in a tunnel, I should

prefer being jammed against the door or smashed *after* having commended myself into God's hands, rather than having utterly ignored Him and His protecting power."

"Then you think Providence is a safer investment than the Insurance Company, 25, Finch Lane—stronger than the Three per Cents?"

"I don't compare them at all," said Gerald, annoyed at being brought to book in this fashion; "but I don't see why you shouldn't go in for both, to use your own style of phraseology; put your trust in God, and still keep your powder dry."

But at this moment their talk was broken up by the entrance of a fresh passenger at Washby Junction, and then Gerald had the supreme pleasure of hearing the whole ground traversed over again by his hatchet-faced companion and the new comer, a heavy man from the Fen country, who was

on his way with some wheat to Mark Lane.

Argument with him was as easy and as promising of result as with a prize bullock of sixty stone; and soon subsided into a deadly silence. To Gerald this silence was pleasant enough, as it allowed his thoughts to outrun the train and speculate as to what had become of Mr. Lorimer, and what opinion was entertained of him in Lincoln's Inn. It was only broken once all the way up, when "the hatchet" said to the prize "beast," as the train stopped at a station, "Is this Pugsby?" "Yes, and good grazing land too."

With the reader's permission, too, we must outstrip the train, and glance for a moment at Mr. Antony Hastings when he paid that intended visit to the lawyer, of which he spoke in his letter to his brother.

After Pugsby there was still another hour

on the rail, and this was slowly and carefully spent by Gerald in thinking over the pros and cons of the whole story presented to him in the narrative of Mr. William Lorimer. "It is a pack of lies, I believe, after all," he said to himself; "but still a matter for Thorn to look into. And besides, I shall see Amy."





CHAPTER V.

ANTONY AT LINCOLN'S INN.

“ Watchman, what of the night—is't foul or fair ?
Do all these rising clouds portend a storm ?”

STONEHENGE.



WELL, Thorn, what is the meaning of all your story about this fellow Lorimer and his claim to Barton? I have waited and waited to hear from you, and now I thought that I had better come myself. The beggar called upon me a day or two after seeing you, as you told me he probably would; but I made short work with him, and warned him off the place as

a d—d impostor.” So spake Mr. Antony Hastings.

“You would have heard from me or seen me,” replies the lawyer, “a week ago, had I really known what more advice to give you. But upon my life, Hastings, I don’t know what to say even now, though I did put a bold face on the matter that night when the fellow first called me downstairs to see him. I have been expecting another visit from him every day, and have only waited for that to see a little more clearly what his plan is, and then decide what to do. The facts, you see, lie in a nutshell. He says that you are both illegitimate, and claims as the nearest legal heir, and as such the Court will probably recognise him if he goes to law about it, unless you can show, as I firmly believe they were, that your father and mother were really married some thirty years ago.”

“Married!” exclaimed Antony, “of course they were married—you know they were, everybody knows they were. Old Sally Hill saw them married down in Hertfordshire, as I have heard her say a score of times.”

“Yes, yes, my friend, all true enough; but Sally Hill is in her coffin in Barton Cemetery, and can’t speak now as to what she saw. What I believe, and you believe, and everybody believes may be all bosh, and is not worth a farthing in the eye of the law without proofs. What you must do is this, forthwith go and search every corner of the old house, every drawer and cranny, and hunt up, if you can, your mother’s marriage certificate. Only find that, and you may tell Mr. Lorimer to go and whistle jigs to a milestone; otherwise, upon my life, the case looks awkward. But of course you will find the document if you search carefully.

Meanwhile, as I told you, he offers to come to terms, owning that it is devilish hard for you to have to give up everything."

"Confound his infernal impudence, Thorn! I should think it would be hard; and I am not going to be done out of my property by any such scoundrel, whatever my brother may do. I wrote to Gerald yesterday, but I doubt whether he will trouble his head to answer the letter. As for searching the Manor House, every hole and corner, every cranny, box, and drawer has been ransacked a dozen times by Amy and myself. By Jupiter, Thorn! she is in an awful state of mind about the matter; 'Not,' she says, 'on account of the money, but the good name of Hastings. Barton lands are good, Antony, but neither lands nor money will wipe out the stain that this fellow is throwing on us and our fair fame.' What she says is true enough, Thorn, but money is

money, for all that, as this confounded impostor Lorimer very well knows. What he is after is Barton Manor and Barton Rents. As to terms, the villain! I will have no terms with him, unless he agrees to go on the treadmill with hard labour for six weeks."

"Not at all likely, Hastings; and joking apart, you must hunt up among all your friends, and all who knew your father, for any scrap of intelligence you can get about the place and date of the marriage. By the way, does Winnecot the barber know anything? He saw more of your father during the last twenty years than any other living creature but old Sally."

"Winnecot would have been the very man," replied Hastings; "but he got a touch of the cholera some six weeks ago, neglected it, and only sent for a doctor when it was too late. I saw the old man, as he specially

sent for me, just before he died ; but though he clearly had something on his mind to say, he was too far gone to speak. That pale-faced, whining woman his wife, came to me with a long, cackling story about her dear John, and his having begged her to fetch me before, but 'how could she leave the poor dear lamb, and him a sufferin' as he were?' "

"That's very unfortunate. If anybody could have helped you, Winnecot was the very man to do it. Is there no one of all your father's friends that you can turn to?"

"He had no friends, no companions, or relations that I know of; he knew nobody but his tenants in Barton's Rents—including, I dare say, the scoundrels who murdered him ; and as for me, as you know, Thorn, I was away for long years together, so that I really know nothing of any stray friends he might have picked up."

“Then all we can do is to advertise again and again, as I have already done, for the marriage certificate of Dorothy Filmore and Samuel Hastings. I only wish that that fellow Simmons had not turned out such a rascal. He would have been the very hand to help you out of this mess. You would have had the marriage certificate in a week; and without it I really do not see what stand you can possibly make if Lorimer goes on with his case, as I suppose he will.”

“But did he leave the matter in doubt?”

“No; I cannot say that he did. But I threw so much cold water on the whole affair, and treated it with such indifference, that he seemed rather staggered at last?”

“Thorn,” replied Antony, “he is an impostor; I will swear he is in any court of law you like. He has it written in his face, in his shuffling walk, in his detestable voice, in his rascally coat, and his infamous hat.”

“Possibly, son Antony, possibly; but for all that, he may be clever enough to get Barton Manor, and turn you and my daughter into the streets. For God’s sake, look at that view! It is on the cards; so set to work at once. If the fellow comes here again, I will do what I can with him. But unless I can meet him with that certificate, or come to some terms——”

“No terms!” interrupted Hastings. “No terms whatever, I say a hundred times!”

“Well, well,” replied the lawyer, “I can say no more now, as I have an appointment in Gray’s Inn, and must be off. Come down to the Lodge to-night after dinner, and bring Amy with you, and then we can talk it over again.”

Then the elder of the two men went off hastily to Gray’s Inn, and the younger sauntered slowly down to the Minerva, to while away an hour in the billiard room,

thinking, however, as he went, more and more gravely of the impostor Mr. W. Lorimer.

This was the state of affairs when the morning express from Easton began to draw near to King's Cross, and Gerald Hastings to a scene in the drama of which he had not the remotest conception.





CHAPTER VI.

FACE TO FACE.

“No, no ! not true. It is some ghastly dream,
Some idle, false chimera of the brain.
Give but the morning time to rise supreme
Above the hills, and all shall be again
Brightness and joy once more.”

STONEHENGE.



UT it was no dream—no false, idle picture of the cloudy night, that morning could scatter with her golden strength ; but a sharp, bitter, and stern reality that smote him on whom it fell with deadly violence. For a time he was utterly shattered, and knew not where to look for human help. He had but one friend

in London, Martin Glenny, and to him Gerald now turned in his hour of distress, knowing that he should find there a friend's hand and heart. But he must tell the story in his own words.

It was a night of wintry rain and wind, when, as St. Patrick's was striking eleven P.M., the bookseller sat listening to his wife as she read aloud the last chapter of a new book, sitting up later than usual to finish it. All at once there came a loud ring at the door, and presently the servant ushered in their old friend Mr. Gerald Hastings—not, as usual, full of life and cheery news, but pale, haggard, wobegone, and silent.

Both started up at once, he with surprise and delight to greet his friend, she in utter amaze at Gerald's appearance.

“Good God! Mr. Hastings,” she exclaimed, “what is the matter?”

All he could do, at first, in answer to this

earnest adjuration, was to shake his friends warmly by the hands, and cast himself idly into a chair, leaning forward on the table, and burying his head in his hands.

At last, however, he roused himself and said in a hoarse voice—

“Only give me time, and I shall be able to tell you my trouble.”

“Not only time, my friend,” said Glenny, in his usual fierce manner, “but a good stiff glass of hot brandy and water. Mary, child, ring for hot water to brew, and administer the dose at once.”

This was done in a trice, and though Gerald protested that he could not drink it—that he neither hungered nor thirsted—his host’s only reply was that of Meg Merrilies to Dominie Sampson—

“Gape, worm, and swallow!”

And so, by dint of loud words, coaxing, and entreating, the mixture was at last

swallowed, and Gerald began to recover himself. In less than an hour he had told them the following story, in reply to many questions, and in many a broken fragment:—

“You know, my dear friends,” he said at last, “how I have worked at Cogsford, and what my motive for work has been, so that that part of my story need not be told. I was gradually regaining my strength, and day by day watching for the time when I could go back to work, when, as I sat scribbling by the sea yesterday, I was sent for to see some man who had called at the hotel and asked to see me on special business. To make a long story short, the fellow called himself Lorimer, professed to be a cousin of mine, and then had the incredible impudence to claim the whole estate and property of Barton Manor, asserting that both Tony and I were illegitimate children, and he himself

was the true heir. Whatever truth there may be in his story, it contained so many lies that I at once ordered him out of the room as an impostor. One of his assertions was that my brother Antony was married—a lie, as I thought, on the very face of it. However, Lorimer went out—went away, furious and indignant, and I saw no more of him. This morning, however, he favoured me with a letter, saying, ‘that he gave me one more chance;’ but this, too, I declined, and determined to run up to town instead, and consult with my brother and Thorn on the whole subject. When I reached King’s Cross I was in doubt for a moment which house to visit first. I decided on Barton Villa, as it was afternoon, and old Thorn would just then be coming home to dinner. Forty minutes in a Hansom took me there easily, and as I went I counted up the many

happy hours I had spent in the lawyer's house, and all my golden dreams about his daughter Amy. I got down at the gate, and to my utter amazement saw a board fastened to the paling, with letters a foot high—‘*This House to Let, &c., &c.*’”

“I could scarcely believe my own eyes. But there it was beyond all possibility of doubt—‘*This House to Let, Inquire of Darton and Co., High Street, Barton Green.*’ Off, therefore, I went to Darton and Co. Did he know Mr. Thorn? certainly he did. Mr. Thorn had left the Villa for a goodish time now, and was living at Barton Lodge, just across the Green, there, near the Manor House.

“I thanked him and walked on at once to the Lodge, which I knew well, and which was even within sight of the agent's door. I rang at the gate, and on inquiry found that Mr. Thorn had not yet returned from

town, though he was expected every minute.

“ ‘Is Mrs. Thorn at home?’

“ ‘No, sir, there’s no one in the ’ouse but the cook and me.’

“ ‘When Mr. Thorn returns, give him this card, and say that I will call and see him this evening.’

“When I got to the Manor House, I found the whole aspect of the place changed; the garden in first-rate order, the flowers tied up and well arranged, the vines against the south wall trimmed, and a garden seat under the elm tree. No signs of Punter, or of pigeon-shooting; the old dovecot gone; and the house itself just recovering from a coat of paint. For a moment I stopped to think; but all the pondering in the world would never tell me what had induced my brother Antony to spend money on a garden, or in brightening up the face of the

Manor House. There was nothing for it but to make my way into the house and see the Lord of the Manor himself. Up the path, therefore, I went, to the old and well-known gateway; and here again change awaited me. The old well-remembered knocker was gone, and with it the old iron handle turning a latch inside. I had to ring before I could gain admission.

“ ‘Is Mr. Antony at home?’

“ ‘No, sir, but Missis is in the drawing-room.’

“ ‘Who is in the drawing-room?’ said I, rather wildly, to the servant—‘who, did you say was in?’

“ ‘I believe she’s in, sir—Missis, I said. Shall I take in your card?’ inquired the servant.

“ ‘Never mind a card,’ said I; say ‘Mr. Gerald Hastings.’

“At this, the servant opened the door wide, and with many apologies begged me to come inside. ‘His mistress, he was sure, would see me directly.’

“Up, therefore, I went at once, by stairs and passages as strange to me in appearance as the outside of the house had been; till we reached a long, low room with windows at both ends overlooking the gardens and fields. The servant having announced my name at the door, closed it, and went out.

“At the further end of the room, sitting near an open window, was a lady, with her back to me, apparently at work, and so intent on it that she did not seem to hear my step.

“But at the sound of my name she suddenly started up, as if in utter amazement, flung down her work, and with both hands leaning on the table, gazed fixedly at me as

I came up the room. In a moment we were face to face—I pale with amazement, and she aghast with a sort of nameless passion of dreadful surprise. For a moment we were both silent.

“ ‘ Good God, Amy,’ I cried out at last, ‘ what brings you here ? They told me that I was to find here the mistress of the house.’ ”

“ ‘ They told you right,’ she slowly replied, in a low and terrible voice—‘ you *do* see the mistress of the house.’ ”

“ ‘ Not the wife of Antony Hastings ; for Heaven’s sake, tell me that this is not true ! The mistress of the house, if you will, but not *his* wife ?’ ”

“ ‘ Both,’ she answered in the same slow, measured, and terrible whisper—‘ both. And where,’ she added, ‘ where should a wife more naturally be than in her husband’s house ?’ ”

“Her horrible coolness, her hard, icy words only added fuel to the fire that was raging at my heart, and I burst out at once into fierce and angry invective.

“‘It is impossible,’ I cried, in a voice equally low and bitter; ‘utterly impossible. I will not believe it. You cannot be, you are *not* the Amy Thorn that I once knew, who had truth and honour stamped upon her heart, honour and truth in every word she spoke, and who, when I once offered her the love of a heart that lived and beat for her alone, bade me go and win a place for myself in the world, and then come and see what answer the woman I loved and honoured had to give me. It is a false and miserable lie. She whom I have known and toiled for all these years, has never cast truth and honour to the winds in this fashion! For God’s sake, for the truth’s sake, speak to me, Amy—speak to me,

and unsay your terrible words. Tell me, it was merely to try me, merely to——’

“ ‘Alas !’ she answered, ‘the words cannot be unsaid. I am the very same Amy Thorn, to whom you once swore such deep and passionate devotion ; for whom only you professed thenceforward to work and to live ; who heard all your eager passionate words of love, devotion, and hope. But from that day to this I have never heard of you, or from you. Days, months, years have gone by, still you never came, and never wrote. I heard nothing, I knew nothing of you, but that you were working hard, making much money, and had found loving friends. Even this came to me in mere scraps of chance news, not direct from yourself, but as if the name of Thorn were forgotten, and another had taken its place——’

“ ‘And this paltry, lying rumour,’ I fiercely

interrupted, ‘as false as the man who set it afloat, you believed and clung to rather than the words of one who loved you better than his own life, and would have given all he had to give to save or serve you! If any but your own lips had told me this, Amy, I would have said they lied—lied foully and shamefully. Shame on the villain who deceived you, whoever he is; for deceived you have been, and are, cheated by a coward and a knave. For I *did* write to your own father, specially and pointedly. Surely *he* never played into this villain’s hands?’

“ ‘No such letter ever reached my father, or I should at once have seen and known it all. In *his* lips a lie would be as poison. No such letter ever reached him.’

“ ‘But I sent messages again and again, thinking that as my letter drew forth no answer from your father, and no notice

from you, I had but to work on, work on in patient hope, at last to win what was to me the very light—the mainspring of my life. Did no one of these words ever reach you?’

“ ‘None. I heard but what I have already told you; neither letter nor message nor single word ever came to tell me that the name of Amy Thorn was yet more to you than any other name, or yet lingered on your lips. You condemn me, Gerald Hastings, fiercely and bitterly; but I have done what I *have* done not without a cause. You call Antony Hastings a villain! I have yet to know why he should not be counted a man of honour. You forget that he is my husband, that he has given me his name, and that his honour is as my own!’

“ ‘But a villain he is, beyond all dispute, if he led you to believe that I had forgotten you; for he knew better. He knew that

the very joy and hope of my life, the spring of all my work, was still the thought of one day coming to you and asking you to share——But what need is there for further parley, or further discussion, when the falsehood he coined you were so ready to receive, and it seems to believe? Shame on him, I say again, and on every one who helped him in the lie. It is idle to tell you that my life is now blighted and broken, that all belief in such words as love and friendship and honour is dead in me; idle to tell you this, for I see it is of no concern to you.”

“‘It is idle,’ she answered, ‘to reason with a man who accuses, but brings no proof; who condemns bitterly and listens to no reply; who merely adds bitterness to bitterness, and to unjust words words still more unjust; as idle as to reason with a madman.’”

At this point Gerald paused in his story, which he had told with much fierce and angry gesticulation, and again buried his head on his arms as before, lost, as it were, in the very bitterness and depth of his grief.

After a time he suddenly started up and went on again, though his story was all but told.

"There, my friend," he said, "now you have it all; now you see why, after wandering half over London, I rush in upon you at such an untimely hour of the night in this wild and mad way. *Madman!* she may well call me—I shall go mad, I think, and——"

"Oh, no, you won't," interrupted Glenney, "though going mad is rather the fashion just at present. Much better eat some supper, and smoke a pipe or two of good honest tobacco. I'll take any odds, Mary, that he hasn't tasted bite or sup since he

left Cogsford, till he had that dose of brandy and water."

"Curses on that false villain Antony Hastings!——"

"By all means," again interrupted Glenny; "by all means, if it will do you a grain of real good. Him it can't harm, so thunder away upon him—"

'Though nobody seem a penny the worse,'

till you are tired; at all events until the cold roast beef appears, and here it comes, too. Now Gerald Hastings, in the midst of all your sorrows, which are sharp as man can know, listen to the voice of a friend. Your own work in life is not done yet, and you say you have to take righteous vengeance on your enemies, to do which righteously and thoroughly, you must not omit to keep your own life going. You are too good and too dear a friend to me to be snuffed out by

a woman, or utterly checkmated by a man. I pity you from the bottom of my soul, but for all that I am not going to let you die like a dog under a hedge in utter despair. So again I say ‘Roast Beef.’ ”

And at last angry, broken hearted, and chafing as he was, Gerald was gradually coaxed and won over by the kindly voices of his two friends to do as he was advised ; to talk freely once more of all his troubles, and to smoke those calm pipes of soothing which only a moderate smoker can enjoy.

He did not go mad that night, or on any future day. But after many hours of extreme suffering, of angry passion, and fierce inner strife, sleep brought to him the gifts which, by God’s mercy, she can surely bring, and, if but for a time, calm rest and oblivion to the troubled spirit.

His troubles were not diminished when he woke the next day, or for many a day, but

he had a new heart to meet them. He had the good sense and the right feeling to seek for true strength where only it can be found—from Him who gives liberally to all who ask for it ; his words and vows of fury and bitterness by degrees died out. He had been wounded, but not to the death. He was ready to take vengeance, but it should be open and just.

No great change, it may seem ; still a change for the better.





CHAPTER VII.

GREEN STREET, BERMONDSEY.

"As thistles wear the softest down,
To hide their prickles till they're grown,
So a smooth knave does greater feats
Than one that idly rails and threats."

BUTLER.



FOR some minutes after Gerald's abrupt departure Amy remained standing as he had left her, utterly overcome with the strange tide of mingled emotion, of surprise and regret, of fear and sorrow, that had suddenly overtaken her. Then she sank back into a chair near the window, and gazed sadly on the dull grey sunset which still glimmered in the western sky.

Though she was conscious in herself of no falsehood, and of no direct wrong, the burning, angry, words of the man who had once declared with all the passion of a brave and ardent soul that he loved her better than his own life, these words had gone home sharply and swiftly to her heart. She pitied him, and felt that he deserved pity; she feared that she had been in some way or other deceived concerning his devotion to her, though she knew not how, or in what way. In spite of all Gerald's strong words, she could not, indeed, after taxing her memory to the utmost, find any just ground for condemning her husband, or even suspecting him of any underhand work. Her father, she knew, was above suspicion. And yet, in spite of all this clear conviction, there had crept into her mind a shadow of something like wrong when she remembered Gerald's fierce assertions that he had sent many mes-

sages to her by his brother, and at least one distinct letter to her father.

But in the midst of these perplexing thoughts she heard her husband's well-known step on the stair, and determined to tell him the whole story at once.

Antony was in no very good temper, for he had played two games of billiards with young Sparrow of the Civil Service, who was regarded as about the worst player at the Minerva, and by some unaccountable 'fluke' had lost both, each being for half a crown. In addition to this, Thorn's parting words about Lorimer still rankled in his mind, so that he was altogether in no amiable mood, as Amy might have seen had she but waited to look at him. She did not wait, however, but began at once.

"Antony, I have had a visitor; guess who it was!"

"Guess! How can I possibly guess?"

That old gossiping woman from the other side of the Green, I suppose, or your pet parson, St. Patrick."

"No—guess again. Neither an old woman nor a parson. And don't lose your temper, sir."

"My temper is in no danger, Amy, and I am too tired to guess any more."

And with these words he flung himself idly into an easy-chair near the window, and began tapping one of the panes of glass with his finger.

"Well, what do you say to Mr. Gerald Hastings?"

"*Gerald Hastings!*" he fiercely exclaimed, starting up from his seat as he spoke; "what on earth brought him here?"

"He came no doubt to see you, Antony, about this fellow Lorimer I suppose; but seemed utterly amazed to find *me* here. Did

you never tell him, or hint to him, a word as to our marriage?"

"Never," replied the Lord of the Manor, suddenly beginning to turn pale.

"Never mentioned it to him, Antony? Surely one's own brother is a person to be told of such an event!"

"Not if that brother happened to select for a wife the very lady chosen by the bridegroom himself. No, no; telling him would only have been spoiling my own chance *in toto*, my dear Amy. All is fair, you know, in love and war."

"And did you, then, give him no inkling at all of what was going to happen?"

"Certainly not, my dear Amy, how could I? It would have been like showing your hand to your adversary at whist."

These answers scarcely satisfied, and certainly did not please the lady, who now sat for several minutes busy at her work in pro-

found silence, while Antony himself went back to his old work on the window-pane. At last silence was again broken.

“Antony,” she said, “I cannot think that you have behaved fairly to your brother, even on your own showing. I do not understand your motive for concealment, especially as I was always led to believe that the matter was one of entire indifference to him. He talked to me to-day of trickery and deception on somebody’s part, and said many bitter things; upbraided me with messages which I never received, and hinted at letters which seem never to have reached their destination. What does it all mean?”

“My dear Amy,” replied the Squire, with unusual softness in his manner, “how can I possibly tell what an angry man means when he gets out of his depth, and says unreasonable things? I don’t wonder that he envies

me my wife, and threatens to be very violent if not very virtuous in the matter. But I shall not mind a few bitter things from him now. Two years ago it would have been different. When does he come here again?"

"That I cannot tell. All I know is that he went away like a madman, after a furious attack on your devoted wife, and full of vengeance against you and against my father, whom he accuses of treating his letters with silent contempt."

"Not your father's style of treating letters, either from friend or foe, Amy. And Gerald was very furious, was he?"

"He went off like a madman, I tell you, vowing vengeance on the whole family, and above all on unfortunate me, who was certainly amazed to find that he had never heard of our marriage."

Fortunately for Mr. Antony Hastings,

at this very crisis the servant announced dinner, and he was even more prompt than usual to obey the summons; as, of course, until the servants had again left the dining-room, all more private conversation was stayed, and then he took special care that it should turn into another channel; an easy task, as Mr. Lorimer's claim had not as yet been fully discussed between them, although they were the two persons most vitally concerned in it.

While they discuss its various pros and cons, the chance of Lorimer's being an impostor, of their being able to discover the lost marriage certificate, or in some way or other to make out a good case for the lawyers, we must turn for a few minutes to a couple of actors in this little drama, of whose doings Mr. Antony was in profound ignorance. Green Street, Bermondsey, was not by any means a tempting retreat, but it was emi-

nently a safe one, and to No. 65, in a long row of small dingy houses, Mr. Lorimer directed the cabman to drive when he reached King's Cross by the morning express; and there in a little dingy back parlour he found his ally, Mr. Foster, alias Simmons, anxiously waiting his arrival.

When Mr. Simmons took that hasty journey to Liverpool alluded to in a former chapter, at the boarding-house where he found a night's lodging, he had met with Lorimer, just returned from the West Indies, and journeyed up to London with him the next day. With the frankness which belongs to a sailor, Lorimer had told the old man all his history.

"I am going back to London," he said, "after knocking about over half the world, shipwrecked in one place and with a touch of yellow fever at another; pockets nearly

empty, and not a soul to welcome me home when I get there. A cousin of mine is a swell at Barton Green, I believe, but I have never seen him, and he knows nothing of me."

Further talk and many questions followed, and from the whole story Simmons soon gathered who his companion must be, as there came back into his mind the remembrance of a certain strange Will of old Sam Hastings of Barton Manor, and Mr. Thorn's anxious inquiry as to whether it was all right."

"Come home with me to-night," said the wily Simmons, when they reached London, "to my quiet lodging in Bermondsey. I think I have a job just ready for you if you care to go in for it."

Lorimer was a bird easily caught in such a net as Simmons's; and the result, after careful consideration and planning out the

whole affair, on the mere chance of the marriage-certificate being not forthcoming, was his sudden appearance at Barton Villa, and then his mission to Gerald Hastings; Simmons having supplied all the money, and in fact concocted the scheme, on condition of receiving £500 out of the first year's income. An agreement to that effect had been drawn up and signed, Lorimer fully believing in the justice of his own cause, and therefore being all the more determined to prosecute his claim to the very end.

How he fared at Barton Villa at the hands of Antony Hastings, and of Gerald at the seaside, has been already told. We have but to take up the thread of the story on the day of his return to Green Street, Bermondsey.

Mr. Foster, a tall, thin, pale-faced man, with a green shade over one eye (which he for some reason or other not connected with

his eyes, kept on night and day), sat at a grimy deal table in that dingy back parlour as Lorimer, carpet-bag in hand, hastily dashed into the room.

“Come at last!” said the old man, “and bringing good news, I hope, as you have been so long over it.”

“Tired and hungry, and sick of the whole business,” replied the sailor ; “and above all, devilish thirsty. I must have something to moisten my throat with before I can say a word ;” and as a pewter pot, half filled with beer, stood on the table, his thirst was soon quenched.

“Now then, mate,” said Foster, “what sort of a voyage have you had?”

“Fair wind all the way, and safe into harbour, but no sort of luck when there. The young swell cut up rough from the very first, and at last threatened to kick me out of doors when I talked of ‘no marriage

lines' and Barton Manor. Then I tried him with a share of the property; but it was all no go, and he took no notice of a letter I wrote and sent to him just before starting this morning. There, my boy, that's the long and short of my log, and what is to be done next? I'm fairly sick of the whole concern."

"The next step is to go to Thorn's office in Lincoln's Inn, and if he won't come to terms, liberal terms too, just let him know that you will put it into your lawyer's hands at once. Be very quiet with him, and very firm. Don't mention the name of Foster, but simply defy him to produce the marriage certificate."

"Why can't you manage this part of the business?"

"Well, my friend, there are certain good reasons why I cannot go to Lincoln's Inn

just now, and as you are the heir, and we go into court in your name, it is best for you to do that part of the business yourself. My share shall be to find out a proper lawyer for you, tell him the whole story, and pay the piper.

“Meanwhile, as you eat your dinner I will once more go over the whole ground for you, that you may have your story all pat at your fingers’ ends. Say as little as possible, and stick clearly to what you do say, for Thorn is a sharp fellow, and will soon pick a hole in it if you give him a chance.”

“You know him, then?”

“Yes,” replied Simmons, very slowly. “I do know him, slightly. I was once in a case where a friend of mine was in trouble, and Thorn was on the other side, and up to all sorts of dodges. He’s a clever fellow,

is Thorn, but all you've got to do is to stick to the chart I have laid down for you."

With this assurance Lorimer was forced to be satisfied, and then turned with a sulky appetite to his dinner.





CHAPTER VIII.

YES OR NO.

“A short answer to a short question, and in a
Short chapter. So best, my masters.”

SPENCE'S PRELUDES.

SIMMONS had thought over the whole scheme with his usual cleverness, and was far too shrewd a scoundrel not to have it well compacted and arranged in all its particulars. When therefore Lorimer presented himself that afternoon in Lincoln's Inn he had his story at his fingers' ends, and quite ready for the lawyer's inspection.

Thorn treated him far more politely than at their former interview, heard him

patiently to the very end, and then simply said—

“ Well, Mr. Lorimer, your case seems at all events well got up and complete enough, but I cannot admit for a single moment the possibility of the Court of Chancery’s believing it, and I am directed by my client not only to resist your claim to the utmost, but to decline entirely your proposal to come to terms.”

After this there was little further to be said on either side.

“ You see,” replied Lorimer, “ all I want, Mr. Thorn, is a plain answer to my question. Do you intend to come to terms or not—yes or no?”

“ Most certainly not, as I have just told you. If you persist in going to law I have no power to prevent you, but you might just as well claim the whole parish of Barton as Barton Manor, of which Mr. Antony

Hastings is determined to keep possession. Are you aware, Mr. Lorimer, that your appeal to the law, and making good your claim, may be a very long and expensive process, and after all be fruitless?"

"Long it may be," replies Lorimer, "and cost something I dare say it will, but I shan't mind waiting. Barton Manor is worth waiting for."

"Cost *something*," repeated the wily lawyer, "yes, it probably will cost something. What do you say to several thousands, and a year or two of waiting while the case goes from court to court till it gets to the House of Lords? Why, it may last a lifetime."

"I am told not," was the rather surly answer. "Foster says——"

"Who says?" inquired Thorn; "who is Foster, if I may ask?"

"No, you may not ask, if it's all the same

to you ; but as it happens, he's only an old ship-mate of mine in the West Indies."

"In the West Indies, Mr. Lorimer? And how did he come to know anything of Barton Manor in the West Indies?"

But at this point Lorimer felt entirely out of his depth, and wisely lapsed into silence for a moment, and then with a smile on his face, said—

"East or West Indies, Mr. Thorn, far or near, it isn't much odds. You say you mean fighting, so do I. So I may as well start on the homeward cruise. Good morning."

Whereupon the sailor calmly put his hat on, and walked out of the office ; leaving Mr. Thorn in a state of considerable perplexity.

"A very cool self-possessed impostor," he thought to himself, "and one who is

thoroughly well-up in his story, and believes entirely in his own case; though he is rather foggy about Foster and the West Indies. If Foster drew up his case he is a deuced long-headed fellow. Perhaps he is not an impostor after all."

That night two solemn battles were held touching this very question of Barton Manor, both long, earnest, and well fought; one over the lawyer's dinner table, and the other in Green Street, Bermondsey; of which battles, however, we can but give the bare result in either case.

"My dear Hastings," said the old man, as he wished his guests good night, "in spite of all you can say, and all we can do, that fellow Lorimer has managed to get up a good case; though he seemed rather staggered when I suggested years of delay, and thousands of pounds in expenses; and we must be prepared for fighting, beyond all

doubt. Amy, my child," he whispered in her ear, "is he deaf to all idea of a compromise?"

"Deaf as a post, papa, and so am I. If Barton is ours we intend to keep it; if not, the fellow ought to have it. But *that* is impossible!"

And so they parted.

There had been but two combatants in the little parlour in Green Street, but much beer had been slowly and triumphantly consumed, many clouds of tobacco smoke blown, and the battle had been steadily waged.

It ended thus: "So the old chap wanted to know who Foster was, did he? Ha! ha! Lorimer, let him want. Before six months are over you shall smoke your pipe in Barton Manor House, or Foster is not my name. Money—thousands—it will cost no doubt; but you see, my boy, what a lucky beggar you are to get hold of a

partner who can and will stand by you with the main chance."

"My dear," said Thorn to his wife that night, "Antony Hastings is a bigger fool than I ever thought he could be. The chances are that Lorimer will win the battle; appeal to the House of Lords is out of the question, and yet that pig-headed fellow won't listen to a word of making terms while the chance remains."





CHAPTER IX.

AT COGSFORD AGAIN.

“Seek constancy in wind, or corn in chaff,
Believe a woman, or an epitaph.”

BYRON.



FOR some days after his terrible calamity Gerald still lingered in town, staying with his kind friends the Glennies, and learning by degrees to talk with them not merely of the gloomy past, but with hope of what might yet be done in the future. But then he began to weary even of their kindness ; he grew tired of the noisy, “ heartless din of the streets,” as he termed it, and longed once more, if not for work, at least for the

quiet of the country or the seaside, where he might, so he thought, fight out in solitude the battle of his broken, disappointed passion. With his brother Antony he had at first determined to have a full and immediate explanation.

“I will wring the truth out of him, by hook or by crook,” he had said to his friend Martin Glenny, “and know from his own lips whether he is the traitor, or the woman whom he has snared for his wife.”

He had even set out on his way to the Manor House, when chance led him through Barton's Rents and Belton Street, where, over the door of No. 26, still appeared the name of *Winnecot*. As he passed, the old familiar word caught Gerald's eye at once, and he was in the very act of entering the shop-door to say a word to the old servant, when he saw in the shop-window, neatly framed and glazed within a broad margin

of black, the following address to the public—

“SARAH WINNECOT.

Resigned unto the Heavenly will,
His wife keeps on the business still.

O. S.”

Shaving was going on as busily as ever inside, and after chatting with the widow a few minutes, and hearing that she had just married Mr. O. Slodger, the undertaker (“over the way, you see, sir, and quite handy,”) “had give up the greengrocery line, and was trying a bit in the second-hand furniture.” Gerald turned to leave the shop, when his foot was caught in the doorway by the corner of an old dingy chest of drawers, which stood exactly in his way.

“That’s a curious old piece of furniture,” he said, looking at it as he spoke.

“Yes,” replied Sarah, “it is a odd piece of goods, sir, but you see, my man that was

was always picking up some old thing of the kind, and this he was uncommon partial to, uncommon. He kep' it, he did, for years and years."

At this Gerald looked at it again, and to his surprise saw, cut just above the top drawer, the two letters "S. H." in a scroll.

On being questioned, she did not know where it came from, but thought it possible it might have been from the Manor House, as the "master" had a good clear out at one time, and Bob brought home more than one lot.

"I believe," said Gerald, "this very old chest of drawers belonged to my father. In any case, I should like to have it."

Mr. Oliah was summoned, and was glad to sell it for a few shillings, and to promise that it should be sent to Martin Glenny's that night, for the new owner to carry away with him into the country.

Having made his purchase, Gerald sauntered slowly on, but by degrees felt less and less inclined to pay a visit to the Manor House. In fact he turned back, and ere the day was over had completely changed his mind.

“I will write the fellow a letter,” he said, “that he will never forget. If I see him I shall lose my temper, and——”

“*That* you certainly will do,” interposes the cool voice of his friend Martin—“what there is yet to lose. Far better try pen and ink. He is no match for you there; and a row with him at the Manor House can do you no possible good, and him no damage.”

The end of it was that, between them, they concocted a brief and pungent letter, which was despatched the night before Gerald left town, and reached Antony as he sat at breakfast. He knew the hand-

writing at a glance, caught it up eagerly, and read as follows :—

“ You have dealt me a hard and cruel blow, such a blow as I never looked for at a brother’s hands ; and, so far, your treachery seems a success. What amount of guilt belongs to you, and what to her whom you have taken from me, you know best ; and like a coward, as you are, you will no doubt contrive to heap upon her most of the punishment which awaits all such knavery. I do not curse you for blighting my life, for there is a degree of baseness worthy only of contempt. I simply despise you, as I should any stray scoundrel fresh from the dock. You have sowed your ground in cunning and selfishness, some day you will reap as you sowed. As to Barton Manor, the whole question to me now is one of utter indifference. Happen what may, into the

hands of a greater knave than the present owner it can never fall.

“I meant to have told you this face to face, but I spare myself the further degradation of seeing you.—G. H.”

The countenance of Mr. Antony Hastings, as he reached the end of this epistle, grew white and bitter with suppressed rage; rage that consumed him, and yet which, under the circumstances, he was afraid to vent. He dared not even look his wife full in the face, though he felt that her eyes were fixed on him, and that he must offer some explanation.

She, however, was the first to break the silence.

“Your correspondence does not seem pleasant, Antony?”

“No, my dear, anything but that,” he answered; “a furious letter from my ami-

able brother, that is all. He seems as mad as a hatter—just in fact what you described him, all fire and fury and big words and kindly maledictions on me and all belonging to me. He meant to have come here, he says, and had it out with me in person, but on second thoughts prefers to give me his blessing in pen and ink. So best, perhaps. *You* have escaped another visitation at all events, Amy. As to this fellow, Lorimer, and his claims, Mr. Gerald scorns the whole business, and leaves the property, he says, to any scoundrel who can get it. But that is more than I mean to do, and so I had better go and see your father at once, before he starts for town.”

With these words he left the room. As he walked hastily down towards the Lodge, Antony tore up the letter into small fragments, and quietly scattered them before the wind. But the sharp, bitter, words had

struck deep, and he never forgot them to his dying day. The wind blew them idly hither and thither by the road-side, and his wife never knew their exact purport; but from that time there sprang up insensibly between her and Antony a thin cool air of distrust, which never passed entirely away, but grew slowly stronger as the days went by, until the breach widened fatally, and trust slowly died out.

As for Gerald himself, he took his friend Martin's advice and went back to Cogsford. There he found plenty of work ready for him, and there also he found a hearty welcome. Tom Driver was the same true friend as ever; even Georgiana was less stony than usual, and though fairly dying of curiosity to know the details of Gerald's misfortune, was content not to worry him with small questions, but to leave her usual fears and apologies unuttered.

It was not long before Gerald had quietly told the story of his sorrows to his old friend as they smoked a final pipe after a long day's work ; and as usual gained no small comfort from Tom's rough but kindly good sense. *His* were no words of mawkish, sugary condolence, but of strong, hearty, shrewd sympathy. After a long chat—

“It is not,” said Gerald at last, “so much of my own individual shipwreck that I complain, or the falseness of one woman—for false she has been in some way or other—but of the utter crash that falls on one's power of trusting again. A blight seems to have passed on all goodness, truth, and beauty.”

“All right, youngster ; that is natural enough to you just at present. You have been wounded to the quick, stabbed from behind by a friend. No wonder that you should take up your parable and run a

muck, as it were, against all womanly truth and beauty and goodness, as you say. But for all that, righteousness is not quite extinct; and there are better fish in the sea than ever came out of it. Some day, perhaps, you will go fishing again."

"I?" replies Gerald, rather fiercely. "I?—never."

"Never is a long time, my boy—too long for you to look through—though sometimes too short to be worth counting. Time does many things for us, and heals many an ugly wound—always excepting the blows that befall a scoundrel—and in time you will learn to see things rather differently. It's a total eclipse for you just now, but even eclipses don't last from January to June. By the way, that letter to your brother was a stinger. What did he say to it?"

"What could he say? He was clever

enough to say nothing. He knew that if he provoked me I might say a word or two for him to old Thorn, or at the Minerva. No, no, he held his tongue, and like a true coward took his punishment in dead silence. I pity the poor wretch his wife; all his spite will be vented on her."

"Don't trouble yourself on that account, my friend. If she is the woman you describe, and I take her to be, she will be quite a match for my gentleman, especially if she suspects any falsehood on his part. Leave a woman alone for any single combat of that kind. She will do more than keep her own ground. But now about this fellow Lorimer. I can see no reason, sense, or justice in your suddenly backing out of the whole concern. It would have done you good to go in and fight him to the very last."

"Far more good," says Gerald, eagerly,

“to come down here and get rid of the whole business, Barton Manor, kith and kin ; let them fight it out, if they will, between themselves. I never wish to hear the name of Barton again. Besides, I have enough here, even if this fellow proves his claim.”

In talk of this kind the pipes of peace at last came to an end ; Georgiana put in her final appearance as usual, and Tom was carried off in triumph to that sacred retreat where the fumes of tobacco never penetrated, and the affairs of the day were reviewed where no outsider could take part in the discussion.

“Tell her the whole story,” whispered Gerald, as he and his friend shook hands ; “or you will have no peace. Free leave.”

Tom smiled grimly at this idea, but he nevertheless, in good time, obeyed it, and his slumbers that night were smooth and unbroken.

“My dear Mr. Gerald,” said the lady, before she left, “how ill you are looking. Do have something before you go to bed.”

“Stuff, stuff, my dear Georgiana,” says her husband; “he has taken something already—the best thing he could take—a good honest pipe of tobacco. All he wants now is sleep, and by to-morrow he will be ready to go a fishing again—eh, Gerald?”

“My dear Tom,” replies the lady, “how can you talk such nonsense as going fishing in such weather as we have had all the week?”

The next day Gerald went in search of his old friends the Cliffords.

They were soon and easily found, for after a somewhat lengthened tour they had come back again to Cogsford for the winter, with a host of sketches to be finished, and their friend Gerald to be looked after. They had heard nothing of him for

months. The welcome he found at the cottage could not be heartier or more genuine even in Tom Driver's own sanctum, but it was more full of comfort and sunshine to Gerald in his trouble, because it had the one element which the other lacked. It had the grace and tenderness and affection of a woman's heart, of which Georgiana had not a particle to give. She had intellect and sentiment, and many gushing words; but all her sugary phrases were but bones without marrow—choice extracts without a spark of living taste in them.

When Hugh Clifford and his daughter had heard all Gerald's story, for a time there was a silence. The old man was smoking as he worked at his easel; the young girl listening with downcast eyes, as she knitted some woollen trifle against the coming November weather.

“Upon my soul, Gerald,” said the painter,

at last, "you did wisely and well not to meet that brother of yours, for you would surely have had to kick him. And it's hard to kick one's own brother. The lady, too, could scarcely have been a shade better. It's a lucky escape for you, on the whole."

"No, papa," said a quiet voice, "not quite so bad as that. No woman that Gerald counted worthy of his love could ever have been so heartless as you think. The treachery is her husband's, not hers. In some way or other she was tricked into what she did, depend on it."

"Yes, yes, child, no doubt; and it's quite right of you to fight the battle of woman-kind whenever you have a chance. But for all that, a woman has no right to throw over a man's offer of his heart in that cool fashion without knowing it was worthless."

"Perhaps she believed it was worthless?"

"But she ought not to have believed it

without clear sure proof, which she certainly had not got. Her husband played a crafty game of some sort, and won the trick; but her game seems to me——”

“You don’t know, sir,” interrupts Grace, “what a difficult game, as you call it, a woman in that position has to play. I can make a dozen excuses for her—a dozen grounds for not finding her so horribly guilty; although I never saw her, and as yet have not heard a word in her defence.”

She spoke these few words so heartily that they touched Gerald deeply, as with a flush upon his cheek he replied—

“Perhaps she had a hard game to play, and was sorely tempted, as I believe, indeed, that she was; but a single word to me would have set the whole matter right, and showed her at least that I was not the false trifler she supposed. But it is like you,” he added, turning to Grace as he spoke,

“it is like you to take the part of the absent, and give every one a fair hearing. But all the same, she has taken the sunshine out of my life—wilfully or not,”

“And for that,” answers the young girl, with flashing eyes, “for that we will never forgive her ; will we, papa ?”

“Certainly not, my dear, certainly not ; especially as she won’t trouble her head one straw whether we do or do not. But, Gracy, I’ll tell you what we *will* do, we will take this poor disconsolate young man away out of himself, and try to put some new sunshine into his life for him. He shall go with us after Christmas our next round through Somerset and Devon, and we will show him all the beauties of St. Mary Redcliffe and Sherborne Minster ; the hideous muddle they are making of Bath Abbey, and the noble work they are beginning at Exeter. He shall journey all along the soft and sunny

shore of the sea down to the mouth of the woody Dart and the winding Tamar, and see pretty faces enough by the way along the Moor to brighten all his dreams, as the springtide begins to crown the hedgerows with tender green, and the woodlands are starred with primroses. There, young people, if you don't call that a poetical programme to get out of an old weather-beaten 'coon' like me, you deserve to be fed on prose for the rest of your days."

The programme thus sketched in rough outline was in due time carried out, after some considerable reluctance on Gerald's part, and still stronger opposition on the part of Georgiana. She knew well how valuable the junior partner was in carrying on the work of Driver and Co., and was therefore unwilling to lose him, even for a few months; while Gerald himself was just in that state when a man fancies he had much

better be left alone to hide away in some crevice by the wayside of life, as if he were a sickly crab waiting for a new shell. Luckily for him, however, his old crony, Tom Driver, was as anxious as his new friends to drag him out of the crevice, and waken him up to new and active life, and together they gave him no rest. At last therefore he was obliged to give way, and the arrangements he made with his partner, in a pecuniary point of view, were so highly advantageous that the soul of Georgiana waxed as radiant as her soul ever did, and she "trusted that the balmy air of Devon, and the invaluable services of his kind friends would together entirely renew him, in spite of all his sorrows."

"Good-bye, my friend," said Tom, as they parted; "don't be down hearted. You're not going to die this time, and certainly not of a broken heart."

“The only man I ever knew die of that complaint,” says Clifford, “was a thundering big fellow at Baltimore. He caught it, so they said, with carrying a hickory plank across the yard on his back. It smashed him.”





CHAPTER X.

THE NEW LORD OF THE MANOR.

“Facilis descensus Averni.”

VIRGIL.

SIX months have passed away since the date of our last chapter, and changes many and great have passed upon some of our old friends at Barton Green. The great case of *Lorimer v. Hastings* has come before the High Court of Chancery and been duly and calmly decided—as calmly and dispassionately as if the question were the settlement of a proposition in Euclid, and no human beings but lawyers had the faintest interest in the decision,

whichever way it turned. For a few days it was the talk of the Clubs, especially the Minerva, and furnished material for three or four racy leading articles in *The Soarer*, and *Daily Tearer*; but then came a choicely-savage murder in Shoreditch, and the sorrows of Mr. Antony Hastings were soon forgotten, with the new-born honours of Mr. W. Lorimer at the Manor House.

The judgment of the Court, in substance, was as follows:

“The defendant has brought forward no legal proof whatever that his father Samuel Hastings ever married defendant’s mother; he, therefore, and his brother, the joint heirs under the Will of the late Samuel Hastings, are, in the eye of the law, illegitimate, as are other children by another mother, as the plaintiff has clearly proved.

“William Lorimer, therefore, the nearest surviving relative of the said Samuel Hast-

ings, is the true heir under the Will, and is entitled to the entire possession of Barton Manor, and all other lands, goods, monies, chattels, &c., &c., appertaining to the same."

William Lorimer, therefore, "the impostor," of whom so many hard things had been said, at once took possession of the Manor House, and Mr. Antony Hastings and his wife were reduced at once from opulence to beggary. He had, indeed, a house over his head, for the new Lord of the Manor had at once sent word to him that if the property were all given up quietly, without bother, he might for the next three months, if he saw fit, live rent-free in a cottage attached to the Manor, at the edge of the lawn. He was also allowed to choose what furniture he thought fit for so humble an abode; but a message was also conveyed at the same time to Mr. Thorn that at the end of the next quarter Barton Lodge

must be given up, or retained only by the payment of a much higher rent.

The result of this sudden and terrible blow on Antony Hastings for a time was impotent, mad, rage, and then utter prostration. He had vowed at first that he would never leave the Manor House, and never give up a fraction of what he possessed as Lord of the Manor. But all such idle threats and vows had ended, of course, only in smoke. He had been stripped of everything—of all he possessed but a £50 note which the “rascally swindler,” he said, “had the grace to give him, and he was put to live in a pauper’s cottage, just outside the Lodge gates. Curse him! he wouldn’t stay there long, to be jeered at and pitied.”

But the bitter end of it all was that he was obliged to stay there for the simple reason that he had nowhere else left him to go and hide his miserable head, and before

long he was thankful to be allowed to stay, in answer to a request made to the Lord of the Manor by his heart-broken wife. Antony had no employment, and knew not how to gain a living, even if he had been willing to work, and gradually began to spend his time in wandering about from tap-room to tap-room of the neighbouring public-houses, drinking when he had money to pay for brandy, or plucking some paltry pigeon in the billiard-room when he had not. His old friends Punter and Straw, having sunk yet lower in the social scale than when we last saw them, again fell foul of him, and, whenever he had five shillings in his pocket, managed to have their full share of it. But the time soon came when even this degree of prosperity failed him. His own resources were exhausted. Thorn's patience was at last worn out. His son-in-law was becoming an idle, miserable sot, and his daughter

a haggard, broken-down, woman. Her parents had done all they could to save him from such ruin, and again and again tried their utmost to persuade her to leave him, or to have him put under proper medical restraint, but nothing could induce her to do either the one or the other.

A desperate and bitter blow had been inflicted on her pride, her ambition, her hopes of greatness in a married life. Instead of raising her, her husband had degraded himself to the depths, and dragged her down almost to the same abject misery as his own. But he was her husband still. She had sworn to honour and obey him; to cleave to him in sickness or in health, in riches or in poverty. She would be true to him still, while life lasted. She remained with him, therefore, all through his last days in the cottage at the edge of the lawn which she had once looked upon as her own; she nursed

him all through the miserable weeks which followed, when one fit after another of *delirium tremens* had set in, and Antony Hastings was little more than a weak and helpless imbecile. Through all this final and bitter stage of misery, Amy, the high-minded, refined, sensitive woman nursed him without a shadow of murmuring or complaint, as if he had been a faultless and loving husband. That he had in some way deceived her—in some way diverted her love from one who was worthy of it to himself who was utterly unworthy, she had long more than suspected. But for all that she was not then going to forsake him in the darkest and worst hour of his life. Such was her true loyalty—her womanly devotion to what she believed to be her duty.

Her trial ended at last; and it was not the bitterest hour of it when fever set in, and released her wretched husband from

“the miseries of this sinful world.” She barely had time and strength to see him laid in his grave, and once more to settle down quietly under her father’s roof, when a fresh trial awaited her, her strength utterly gave way, and for many days her life was despaired of in giving birth to a child, whose coming, in happier days might have been to her a source of unmixed blessing. But she battled through her hour of peril, and her little son gradually grew to be to her a source of new hope and joy, as he was a pet and a plaything to the old people.

“The very best thing, my dear, that ever could have happened for you,” said her mother, when the boy was some three months old. “You have something to live for now, to work for, to hope for. So, as your father says, my dear, ‘let the dead bury their dead.’ You stick to the living.”

It was a hard lesson, but not so hard

that it could not be learned ; and by degrees it grew easier. The boy, whom she had insisted on having christened Gerald, grew up to be a fine spirited, sturdy, fellow ; and his mother gradually began to recover her old health and spirits. The old beauty of her face, and power of expression, began to revive. She had passed through the fire, but, like good metal, had come out of the trial all the brighter, purer, and stronger for the flame. Her child was very dear to her ; she would live for him. He should win for her the fame and the place for which she had thirsted as yet in vain.

Meanwhile, the new Lord of the Manor, after his kind, was ‘enjoying life’ as he phrased it. He had lighted the candle not only at both ends, but now and then in the middle. The consequence of this was a large consumption of tallow, and not a proportionate degree of light. But Mr.

Lorimer was not, as we have seen, a person of very refined tastes ; and didn't mind a little smoke, a strong odour, and a blaze of flickering light. Nor did his friends. They were mostly of the Straw and Punter class ; and as long as they had free run of the Manor House ; a good tap of bitter-beer, and a good cask of whisky at hand, troubled their heads about very little else. They indulged, and humoured, and fawned upon the master of the house, but wisely let him have his own way, especially in small matters, where, as a weak fool often does, he often insisted on having it, though he was as often utterly careless in great ones. Thus, little by little, he drifted into the hands of a set of sharpers and blacklegs, who fairly lived upon him ; though he had wisely, as yet, resisted all the blandishments of such female acquaintances as his friends had sedulously thrust upon him. At times,

too, he was even generous in his way. He had attended the funeral of Antony Hastings, "poor devil," as he called him, and insisted on defraying all the funeral expenses. He had even sent to Amy another Fifty pound note; and allowed Thorn to live on in the Lodge without that sudden increase of rent which he had previously threatened to demand.

All these things had made matters much less rough and untimely in the lawyer's household; though it was still very different from what it had been in the old palmy days when we first saw it. A little sunshine began to steal over the household now and then, and young Gerald Hastings was in great danger of becoming a spoilt child. He began to establish a quiet system of rule over his mother and the old people, which they knew to be perilous, altogether intolerable, and yet tacitly permitted. This was the state of affairs when one day his

mother chanced to be hunting through a pile of papers, in her husband's desk, in search of a receipt. It was for some small debt incurred during her husband's lifetime, and as she had a distinct remembrance of having once paid the bill, she had firmly declined to pay it again. Amidst a mass of papers of all sorts, and in terrible confusion, she at last found what she wanted. It chanced to be for some rare Bantam fowls which Antony had purchased for her in the early days of their married life, and had evidently been carried in his pocket with some other papers for a long time, for it was creased and folded, and much worn.

As she took it from the drawer, a second much smaller paper fell from it to the ground, which she was about to throw back again into the drawer, when the writing arrested her attention and she opened it. It was a half-sheet of note paper,

also torn and creased like the other, which had evidently been carried about in a pocket for some time, and then been cast aside into the desk. She opened it idly enough, and to her amazement read as follows :

“ MY DEAR SIR,—When I tell you that I have just seen to-day’s papers, and read the column headed ‘ *The Guaxara Mines*,’ you will understand why I trouble you with these few lines. The loss is a heavy one to me, but I know that it is still heavier to you ; and I cannot help remembering that though you first told us of the joys of “ *Ten per cent.*,” it was a friend’s voice that warned us to be content with “ *Three.*” I am working hard at engineering, and like my new life better than my old one.

“ Truly yours,

“ GERALD HASTINGS.

“ J. Thorn, Esq.

“ P.S.—Please to tell my old friend, Miss Amy, that her advice was the best man ever had; and that I shall never give up the hope it inspires till she herself bids me.”

As she finished reading the final words the paper dropped from her hands, and she sank back in her chair, lost in a horror of terrible amazement.

Here then, at last, was the key to all the misery of her past life, and to its hopeless future. Here were the true words of the man who had loved her with all his heart; plain, hearty, unmistakeable words, addressed, clearly, to her own father, but which by some unaccountable means or other had got into her husband's hands, and had been hidden from every eye they were meant to meet.

This was the treachery which had shipwrecked his life, and blighted hers.

And, now, it was too late ! Too late ! terrible and awful words, which once at least in every human life unfold their fearful meaning to each one of us.

For a time she sat thus, alone, lost in a wilderness of dreary and bitter thought. Look which way she would, nothing could be done to rectify the evil. The past was irrevocable ; and as for the future, what could she do ?

He who had wrought the evil and darkened the sunshine of two lives, was now beyond the reach of earthly enmity, or restitution. He could neither undo nor atone for his treachery. All she could ever hope to do would be to clear herself in Gerald's eyes of any share in the direct guilt of suppressing his letter to her father, and treating with silent contempt the true words of the man who had loved and trusted

her. And even of this, the hope was but a faint one ; for Gerald had left London, and for all she knew had left England, and she might never see him again.

It was with a sad heart that she told her story that night to her father ; having not only to accuse her own husband of treachery, but to accuse him when he was beyond the reach of all human passion, and with all past things, silently waiting for the judgment of Heaven.

It was with a sad heart that the old man listened ; conscious that he had always thrown cold water on Gerald's proposal, and helped to checkmate it ; while he had done all he could to encourage that of the miserable being who had brought such misery on himself and all belonging to him.

“My child,” he said at last, “it is a

bitter and wretched business, and I can see no way of touching it that does not threaten to be worse than useless. But some day or other, no doubt, Gerald Hastings will turn up again. It is in the very nature of things that we shall meet somewhere or other, if only because our meeting now seems so improbable. Nothing is so likely, so wise men say, as the improbable. Some day you will see him yourself, and tell him the truth of your story. Meanwhile give me the letter. I will seal it up, with a full explanation, and take care, if he never appears here again, that it shall go into the hands of his old friend Driver at Cogsford. Through that channel, if any, it is sure to reach him."

And with this barren hope of some day being able to disprove her own falseness, Amy was forced to be content. But

a shadow had again fallen over her path from which it was hard to escape, and from which she did not escape for many a long day.






CHAPTER XI.

SUNSHINE.

“It is fine
To stand upon some lofty mountain thought,
And feel thy spirit stretch into a view.”

BAILEY.

ERALD had now been away with his friends for some months, having made the projected tour, returned for a time to Cogsford, and again joined them during their ramble among the noble churches of the west of England. And the change of scene had gradually done for him what time and change usually do for those whose minds are at all in tune with the world of

nature, and who have hearts to feel the affection of true sympathy. It had brought entire change of ideas, and opened up for him, as it were, new hunting-grounds for busy thought. Not that the past was blotted out. On the contrary, it was, at times, as distinctly before him as it had ever been: The shrewd old painter was not one of those anxious comforters who are ever urging the mourner "to bury his dead out of his sight," and have done with it.

"Grave-digging," he would say, "is not a pleasant business at any time; and if a man has such work to do, he had better choose his own time and place, and be as long over it as he likes."

Whenever, therefore, Gerald felt inclined to talk of the past, they readily let him do so; and so by degrees won him to talk of it less wearily, and at last as cheerily as

themselves. Such is the force of true, generous sympathy.

It was while away on this tour that Gerald, in a letter from Martin Glenny, heard of the sad death of his brother. "I chanced to meet old Sarah Satchell last week," he said, "and heard all the miserable story of your brother Antony's last days. He never bore up, it seems, after the heavy blow of the loss of Barton fell on him; but gave way to his love for drink, which brought further misery on him, and ended in *delirium tremens*. His wife fought bravely through it all, survived the birth of her little son, and is now, I think, once more under her father's roof."

This was all that Gerald had ever heard of Antony's hapless fate. It came upon him suddenly and bitterly; and though he might have wished to see his brother once again before death ended so miserable a

career, he also felt that his presence at Barton could have been no real good to any one. In any case, regret was now useless. The blow had fallen; he could do nothing to lessen its weight. For a moment a thought of the widow rested on his mind, but only for a moment. Once she was all in all to him; but a change had begun.

Before long he began to take wider, broader views of life; to look at things apart from himself, not only as they bore upon his own personal well-being or discomfort; and so to gain strength from Clifford's wise and kindly words.

"When you have fought as long and as tough a battle with men and things as I have, Hastings, you will find out that after all there is something grander than sailing in smooth water, and having the sun and wind exactly at your own choosing; that it is greater and better even to lose one's

life than to save it. Old-fashioned philosophy, isn't it? and yet true. Not," he would add, "not that you are a selfish beggar. No, no, not a grain of that in you, or you wouldn't find me preaching in this style. One may as well try toasting a piece of ice as attempt to make a selfish man believe in any but number one."

Talk like this at rare intervals, was like a healthy tonic to Gerald Hastings. It took him out of himself; and if the words were sometimes a little rougher in their flavour than was pleasant at first, Grace was always at hand to dash a drop of honey into the draught, and with quiet winning sunshine light up what seemed like a shadow on their friend's face.

A single glimpse of their life at this time will show how the intimacy of the trio had ripened into warm friendship, in its fullest and truest sense.

One calm evening in May, the old man was busily at work sketching one of the grey, moss-grown towers of a fine old minster church overlooking the sea. It stood on a rocky cliff, with a broad sweep of thymy down all round it, and the little churchyard and its cluster of simple grave-stones lying under the shadow of the quiet and solemn walls like a flock of sheep on the hill-side. A hundred feet below the cliff stretched a smooth and unbroken expanse of shining sea, here and there of deep lustrous blue, but barred with patches of darkening grey, as the clouds swept slowly on overhead; and away on the far off edge of the horizon quivering with touches of rosy gold. Close above the distant line of sea shone one long narrow domain of sky of a soft and silvery green, through which the sun had gone down to rest, and in which now glimmered the first

faint star of evening. Above that one star were piled great masses of purple and grey clouds, rising into all sorts of fantastic shapes, and here and there showing through some tiny rift glimpses of golden light, or pale green azure beyond.

Close to where the old man sat hard at work, Grace Clifford and Gerald also sat, near the edge of the cliff, watching the splendour of the quiet waves, sea, and sky, as the daylight slowly faded. She had been reading aloud to her father, and then Gerald had taken his turn, and pleasant talk had followed; but gradually the profound peacefulness of the whole scene had infected the talkers, and for a few moments all were silent.

Still keeping steadily at his work, the old man was the first to break silence.

“And so,” said Clifford, “you are determined to go with us, Gerald, when our next

trip is over, and see the New World—away there, across the western waves—eh?”

“Yes, quite determined, if you will have me for a companion. It’s very hard if I cannot find some work in New York, of some kind or other; and Tom Driver has promised me first-rate letters. I have nothing to keep me in England now.”

“Nothing?” said a quiet voice at his elbow.

“No,” he answered, looking down into a pair of soft, loving, dark eyes, that with upturned glance waited for his reply. “Honest old Tom Driver I shall be very sorry to leave, and Martin Glenney and his wife; but apart from these, I have not a friend. I have lived my life, I suppose, and——”

“Stuff and nonsense!” interrupts a rough, jolly voice. “I thought that I had knocked all that rot out of your head, youngster. You

have not fairly begun to live your life yet!"

"Besides, papa, what is the use of his going to New York if his life is gone before he starts? I, for one, don't vote for a defunct passenger on board the same ship with us. It would be unlucky. I prefer life, and living people."

"It is you, then," eagerly answered the young man—"it is you that have taught me to live, and given me new hope and new——"

"Ah! now," says the rough voice again, "now you're coming to your senses, man, and talking like a reasonable being; and under those happy circumstance we had, I think, better pack up books and sketching tools, and get back to the Blue Lion as soon as possible. I am waxing cold, hungry, and weary, and want my dinner, just when you two young people are growing sentimental.

It is too ethereal a diet for me, after three hours' sketching."

But against this the young lady protested fiercely.

"I deny the charge *in toto*, papa. Instead of waxing sentimental, I was dealing with plain matters of fact, asking Gerald if he had no friends here in his own country, before he begins to search for them among strangers, in a strange land; and objecting to his presence on board ship, if he at all inclines to the 'cast' of Jonah."

At which reply the old man laughed heartily, as did Gerald himself; and then all three set out to walk over the down to the Blue Lion, a quiet roadside inn, where they had found very snug quarters, and a very jolly landlord, who brewed and drank his own good ale.

It was a pleasant walk, and in pleasant company, under the soft, mellow light of a

true summer evening, and Gerald never forgot it.

“I shall date my new life,” he whispered, in a willing ear, “from to-night. May shall be the month of my exodus, and henceforward crowned in my mind with fresh flowers and sunshine and all pleasant things.”

A pair of bright, laughing eyes smiled happily upon him as he said this ; and then she said—

“And when do you go to London?”

“I had much rather stay here.”

“When do you go to London, sir?”

“Must I go?”

“You said you ought to go, only yesterday, and that you were going. You ought not to leave England without seeing your old friend the Blind man, and his charming wife.”

“Yes, I said so yesterday ; but I find

it's harder to go than I thought when to-day arrives. Still, I *will* go, if you command me."

"Very well, sir ; then receive my commands now, and remember that you have a whole string of commissions to execute for me. Look up your old friends, the Glen-nies ; take a farewell glance at Babylon before you leave it, and settle all those legal matters which a month ago were, you said, of such vital importance. By the way," she added playfully, "you must not forget the charming widow, or the papers you were in search of, about some silver mines in which you were once both concerned, I think."

The latter words startled him for a moment, but he answered firmly enough—

"The papers must be, I think, in the old chest of drawers which I left at Driver's house ; and as you talk of going back to

Cogsford, and *I must* have those papers, my journey to London may be put off, and we can all start for Lincolnshire together. I promise faithfully to go then, and to fulfil all your commissions; though as for the charming widow, she will scarcely care to see me."

After another week of sunny rambling in Devonshire, the trio once more turned their faces to the north, and taking a steamer at Bristol crossed over into Monmouthshire, and so slowly made their way by coach to Hereford, Worcester, and Lichfield, and thence once more into the land of dykes and canals. As Cogsford had not changed during the previous hundred years in dulness, flatness, and deadness, it was not likely to have changed during their three months' absence. It was Cogsford still, but there the Cliffords rested for a time, and finally revised all their work; there

Gerald made his last arrangements with his old friends the Drivers, hunted up his papers, and prepared to set out on his final trip to London.

It was two days after their arrival at Cogsford when, as Grace and her father sat quietly at breakfast, Gerald suddenly rushed into the room in a frantic state of excitement, at which both started up in wild alarm.

“Good Heavens!” exclaimed the old man, “what on earth is the matter? Are you and Driver made heads of the Ordnance Survey? is the village on fire? or has the lady had twins!”

“Guess again, guess again,” cried the new comer, still pacing the room in the same frantic state; “nothing half so commonplace or so probable has appeared!”

“Then,” said the painter, “that tall curate with the long sheep’s face and the

Noah's Ark coat, whom I saw yesterday, has gone mad in the night and bitten you this morning !”

“Or still more likely, papa, that strong-minded young woman his sister, who keeps house for him, and looks after all the male persons in the parish, has called upon our friend this morning, and proposed to him before he starts for New York.”

“That's it, Gracy, beyond a doubt—that's it,” replies Clifford ; “and if she has, ‘Jonah’ will have to take a wife with him, and we shall see nothing of him all the way out. What will the young widow at Barton say to all this? She may have an eye on Jonah herself.”—Whereupon father and daughter broke into such a hearty, genuine burst of laughter that Gerald had also to give way, and laughing in spite of himself, answered, “Very well, you are both itching to hear my secret, I can see, but in reply to all

your disgraceful 'chaff' I will not reveal a single word until I come back from London. For to London I must now go at once by express, and I shall see the charming widow, as you call her."

"Then your guess is a true one, Gracy, after all," replied Clifford. "My dear, Miss Slater has declared her intentions, and he is off to Barton to know whether the lady there will forbid the banns or not."

All this, and a great deal more banter of the same kind, Gerald bore with great good nature. Whatever his secret was, it had clearly filled him with new spirits, and roused him to a sense of work to be done at once, and with all his strength. But in spite of all his friends could say, all the father's rough banter, and Grace Clifford's more dangerous irony, he would not utter a single word more as to his mysterious secret, or the sudden cause of his immediate departure to

London. He left Cogsford that morning by the express, dined quietly at the King's Cross Station, and was soon in a cab on his way to Barton Lodge.

What befell him there deserves a place in a new chapter, If his visit seemed strange to his friends at Cogsford, doubly unexpected was it to all at the Lodge, who had, indeed, heard nothing certain whatever of him for many a long month, and were even in doubt whether he was still in England.





CHAPTER XII.

A SURPRISE.

“Were his eyes open? Yes; and his mouth too.

Surprise has this effect, to make one dumb,
Yet leave the gate which eloquence slips through,
As wide as if a long speech were to come.”

BYRON.



OR a short time Gerald debated with himself whether he should go at once direct to Barton Lodge, or write and announce his intention of calling on the following morning. But he at last decided on going at once, hailed a Hansom, and set out for the lawyer's house.

Now it so chanced that on that day Mrs. Thorn had gone to dine with her old friend

Miss Satchell, on the other side of the Green, so that father and daughter were spending the evening alone. Dinner was over, but the old flow of pleasant talk, such as we have found in bygone days between them, had apparently failed or died out. Amy was silent and busy at her knitting, the lawyer slowly and solemnly imbibing a glass of old port, and thinking over the past.

All at once his reverie was interrupted by the servant, who appeared with a card in her hand.

"The gentleman," she said, handing it to her master, "wants to see you, sir, or Mrs. Hastings."

"Who is it, papa?"

"I can't quite make out the name, my dear, without my glasses—there it is. Your eyes are younger than mine." And with

these words he threw the card over to where she sat.

“Good heavens!” she answered, “it’s Mr. Gerald Hastings.”

“Show the gentleman,” she said to the servant, “into your master’s study directly.” Sarah at once left the room.

“I must see him first, papa, and alone, whatever his object may be in coming. I have to clear myself of the stain of a lie at all events. Have you got *that* letter here, or is it in Lincoln’s Inn?”

She spoke the last words with a passionate eagerness which almost startled the old man, and he rose hastily at once to unlock a drawer in his secretary.

“Here it is,” he replied, “brought up from my study only a day or two ago, to be sent to Cogsford as soon as I had a reply to my letter of inquiry to Mr. Driver. You shall see him alone, Amy, as you wish. It

is better you should do so, at first at all events. But remember I have to clear myself in the man's eyes also. He must hear me too, before he goes."

"Your name," she answered, "is bound up with mine, and both must be cleared. Then she went slowly down stairs."

Gerald heard the light footsteps descending the stairs as they drew nearer and nearer to the study. Time had been when the very sound of her step thrilled through him with a strange touch of joy. But that day was gone. He heard it now, not unmoved, but with a feeling in which pleasure had no part.

She entered the room with much of her old beauty, and all her usual dignity of manner. But her face was pale, and her dark eyes not full of their wonted splendour, though the same sense of power marked the whole countenance as she bowed deeply in

reply to his greeting at her entrance. For a moment, as she entered, her hand had involuntarily moved towards him; but his whole attitude was one which completely checked the movement, and the interview opened with an air of coldness and restraint on both sides.

“I am sorry,” he said, “to have intruded on you, Mrs. Hastings, at an hour so unusual for visitors, especially for one so unexpected, and so little likely to be welcome as myself.”

“Unexpected you are,” replied the calm, clear, well-remembered voice, “but not unwelcome. For many a weary month I have wished to see you. And though the few words I have to say touch on ground full of pain to both of us, and doubly so to me, I have longed for the chance to say them in person. And *said* they must be.”

“Pardon me,” answered her visitor, “if

I am not so eager to hear as you may be to speak them. If what you have to say relates to the past it were far better left unsaid. The whole of that past which lies between us two has to me become so dark and bitter, that I would gladly avoid all mention of it."

"Dark and bitter enough in all conscience," she answered quickly, and with kindling eyes; "and yet not so dark as not to demand common justice for one on whom, as yet, has fallen all its guilty shadow. I claim a right to speak, which Gerald Hastings will be the last man to refuse, though that claim is for a woman whom he has learned to despise, if not to hate."

"You assume," he answered, "far more than I can admit, and far more than any words or actions of mine have warranted. But I listen readily; God forbid that you should ask for common justice in vain,

though nothing can alter the past to me."

"Be it so," she said; "my words shall be few, and have but one aim—to clear myself of the stain of falsehood in the eyes of a man of honour. Listen, then. I need not tell you of all the disgrace and shame that has of late fallen on Barton Manor and his name who was once its master and my husband. What all London knew for days, you knew, beyond a doubt. His death left me a beggar, ruined in fortune, in home, in memory of the past, and almost in hopes for the future. A cloud of shame hung round me, but the bitterest element in that shame was the charge that I had basely deceived you; that knowing you still to be true and living only for me, I had wilfully treated you as false; in a word, that I had basely sold myself for money alone and money's worth, and

cast all my plighted words to the winds."

"Precisely," he bitterly interrupted ;
"you have described the case to the very letter."

"You have no wish to add to it?"

"None."

"Be it so, then. This was my crime, cruel and mean enough to debase the fairest lips that ever spoke, to degrade the proudest heart that ever beat. I told you once, at our last meeting, that I was guiltless of this crime, that I knew nothing of your constancy, that not a single message, word, or sign of your remembering me ever reached my ear ; on the contrary, I was led in athousand ways to believe that you had entirely forgotten Amy Thorn and found new and brighter hopes elsewhere. You then answered my assertion with passionate words of scorn, anger, and unbelief, and you

specially alluded to some letter written to my father, which you said alone proved that you had never forgotten me or renounced your own vows of unshaken trust.

“A few months ago, while searching for other papers, in an old desk of my husband’s—the man to whom I sold myself, I came suddenly upon a folded letter, clearly addressed to my father, but which until that moment had been hidden with cruel malice from us all. I swear to you, Gerald Hastings, as surely as Heaven is above us, that those words of yours had been seen by no eye but his who hid them away, until when, to my horror and to my shame, I read them myself and with fresh shame gave them into my father’s hands. There,” she added, as she rose and put the letter into his hand, “there is the paper, as I found it, stained possibly with tears of bitter sorrow as I read it, but still unstained with the

paltry shadow of a lie. Stay, stay," she said, as he strove to interrupt her, "one word more, and I have done. Had I read those words, as I ought to have done, on the day that they were first written, the past might to both of us have been without a cloud, and the future bright with hope. Do you believe me now?"

Gerald also had risen from his seat, and now stood before the young, beautiful, and impassioned woman silent and amazed.

"I believe," he said slowly at last, in a voice that was terrible for its coldness and despair—"I believe all you have said, Amy; but it is *too late! too late!*"

"Never too late," she eagerly replied, her eyes flashing proudly as she spoke, "never too late to trample out a lie, to lay bare a scheme of cruel treachery; never too late for a man of honour to clear the memory of the woman he has once loved, even though

he love her no longer. And now," she added, "I have said all that I wished to say, and I can read it in your eyes that you *do* believe me, and I am content. I am ready now to hear whatever business has given you the pain of entering Barton Villa."

"You have told me," he answered slowly, "what has surprised, pained, and amazed me beyond words. I have also tidings that will surprise you, but I hope bring no pain to you, or to any here. Yet, as things are, they had perhaps better be told in your father's presence as well as your own, and I will wait his coming."

The bell was rung for a servant, and presently the lawyer entered, bowed somewhat stiffly to his visitor, and seating himself, waited for Gerald to speak.

"Mr. Thorn," said the young man, and his voice slightly trembled as he spoke,

“your daughter has explained one bitter portion of the past which, in my eyes, had clouded her name as well as yours with a shame unworthy of it, and of her. But the cloud has now gone for ever, and I see that I have been the victim of a treachery with which you had not the faintest connexion—treachery too late to rectify, though it may die out with the past. My visit to you, to-night, however, was for no such things as these, but purely a matter of business. When last in town I chanced to pick up at a shop in Belton Street, old Winnecot’s, my father’s servant, an old chest of drawers once belonging to the Manor House, which I carried away into the country. There it has lain unnoticed for many months, though now and then used as a storehouse for odd papers. Yesterday, in searching for some old papers connected with the Guaxara Mines, I suddenly came upon a secret

drawer which flew open at a chance touch, clearly after being shut up for many a long year. It contained a solitary bundle of yellow, faded letters, and this one parchment, which I now deliver into your hands. It is, as you will see, the marriage certificate of SAMUEL HASTINGS and DOROTHY FILMORE, duly attested, signed and sealed; and will restore Barton Manor to the true heir."

Breathless astonishment was now the one feeling stamped on the lawyer's face as he rose to receive the paper from Gerald's hands, but for the life of him he could not speak.

Gerald therefore had to begin again.

"I have nothing more to add," he said, "now, but that I am about to leave England, probably for ever; and I am glad, Mr. Thorn, before I go, to shake you by the hand once more, as a man whom I can still honour and respect."

And then he turned to the beautiful girl whom he had once loved, and who stood watching him with tearful eyes, and a face crowded with mingled regret, hope, and fear.

“To you, Amy,” and his voice grew broken and tender as he spoke, “I can only say you have taken a load from my heart; but I can indeed rejoice now to think that mine has been the hand to bring you back to a home of comfort, and to all the beauty and brightness of a good name, to crown it with joy and hope for the future. Good-bye, Amy Thorn, for by that name I shall remember you in the years that are to come. May they be many and bright to you, and to the new heir of Barton Manor.”

“God bless you, Gerald Hastings,” she answered, as they shook hands; “God bless you for your visit this night, which has lifted a burden from my heart, as well as

from your own. May God reward you for your generous deeds to my son and to me. And reward you he will, some day, with the love of a woman worthy of so brave and true and noble a heart as you can give her."

And thus they parted. In another moment, in spite of all entreaties, he was gone; and father and daughter were left in a strange state of mingled amazement, joy, and regret, to talk over the strange and eventful things that had befallen them.

And thus Gerald Hastings became Lord of Barton Manor. To Amy it was a night of solemn and tender regret, and of hearty thankfulness; to her father, of joy and pride—let us hope of thanks also, where thanks were due.



CHAPTER XIII.

OVER THE SEA.

“ Each small breath
Disturbs the quiet of poor shallow waters ;
But winds must arm themselves, ere the large sea
Puts forth its solemn might.”

HABINGTON.



WHEN Gerald Hastings had paid a hasty visit to his old friend Martin Glenney and his wife, and explained the strange events that had brought him to London once more, as well as the history of the previous evening, there was nothing to detain him any longer in town. His talk with the bookseller and his wife was long and kindly, for he had learned to love them and they to

value his affection. He told them fully of his intended voyage to the New World, and of his bright hopes for the future ; and into all these they entered with genial and hearty sympathy, though both wished they had seen the charming Grace Clifford whose beauty and whose virtues seemed to have healed and won his heart, and of whom he was never weary of talking.

“I need not ask you not to forget us,” said Martin, “as they shook hands for the last time, or say how welcome any tidings of your work and happiness will be ; because you are not the man to forget, or to doubt the love of a true friend. God be with you by land and sea, through sunshine and shade, and crown your life with the brightness of her love who will be one with you to the end.”

More eyes than Mary’s were dim with tears at that friendly parting, and Gerald

was not sorry when it was over and he was safely ensconced in the fast train to Cogsford.

Even a journey into Lincolnshire ends at last, and the welcome which greeted him that evening in the quiet village was no less hearty than the one he had left in busy London. His old ally, Tom Driver, was roused to an unusual degree of jollity at the double budget of good news which Gerald had to reveal; and even Georgiana was so far infected with her husband's fervour as to forget to apologize for any shortcomings at dinner, or unfinished arrangements in the spare room, and to omit sniffing at the odour of tobacco as she passed the door of the sanctum.

"You have fallen on your legs, my boy," were Tom's final words as they parted for the night, "as I always thought you would; and I am deuced glad that the young woman was

not, after all, so false as she seemed, and the lawyer, too, not so crooked as might be expected from the craft. Though I must say, Gerald Hastings, I wish to Heaven that you had found work and a wife in Old England."

But the Cliffords, next morning, were even more surprised and more enthusiastic.

"It's a romance," said the old painter, as Gerald, with eager words and a radiant smile on his face, finished the account of his day's adventures in London; "quite a romance, and your genius of a Blind man ought to make a good, stirring, three volumes out of it. All it wants is the murder that old Winnecot was charged with being cleared up, and the charming widow forthwith married to the noble Paladin, who in the very agony of the plot should start up to discover and avenge it. A glimpse

of the condemned cell, or a peep at Sir Cresswell Cresswell, is a vital——”

“Yes, yes, papa,” says a pleasant, musical voice, “we are aware of all that; but we are not as yet certain that the charming widow in this case may not, after all, be contemplating matrimony at this very moment. Mr. Gerald may yet have another secret in store for us, another mysterious visit to London, and another surprise as great and delicious as——”

“No treason,” gaily interrupted the accused, “no treason, Grace; scold me as much as you please, but you have got to the end of all my mysteries now, and I have done with Babylon for many a long day, with charming widows, and with wily lawyers.”

Within a week from that time they were at Liverpool, and all fairly on board the good ship *Orion*, on her way to New York, with

a goodly complement of passengers, a well-chosen crew, and a Captain of known skill and experience. The first few days of a prosperous voyage at sea have been too often and too well described to need description here. The *Orion* was a large and well-found ship, and the comfort of the passengers had been specially considered. Gerald and Miles Clifford shared a roomy cabin, about midships, which they had secured a week or two before the vessel sailed; while Grace had the advantage of one small but airy cabin on the deck, specially fitted for ladies. Both father and daughter were good sailors. And after the first week, Gerald began to find his sea-legs, and was able, not only to make a good appearance at the numberless meals which seemed to invite the attention of all who could eat and drink, but to smoke his pipe over a long yarn of an evening when the good ship slipped lazily and

smoothly along through clear water, with a fair breeze, and all going merry as a marriage bell.

This was the time, too, when, the weather being fair, the ladies often ventured on deck, and Grace Clifford gave herself up to all happy and bright thoughts, as she and her beloved watched some glorious sunset die along the wide waste of waters, and talked of their happy future beyond the waves. There, at last, the old painter was to rest after a life of toil; there Gerald was to set to work with all the faith and courage of a man gifted with new hopes, and there his darling Grace was to make a "Home" in its truest and most blessed sense for old age as it declined, and for the true and brave young knight who had sworn to spend his life in her service. A few weeks, and they would be there. And meanwhile, the golden days of bright sun and blue

waves, of grey and golden mornings and of ruddy sunsets, of fair winds and still gentler waves, went swiftly by. Never had the silver moon risen on a more gallant ship, a more trusty crew, brighter hopes, or fairer promise than moon after moon looked down upon during those early days. Never had dusky night put on a nobler, brighter crown than shone upon the sea, as Gerald and his companion again and again watched the first stars rise out of the cloudy mist. One night, however, after all the passengers were snugly below, there came a change. Gerald had lingered on deck, chatting with the Captain until very late; when the wind suddenly shifted to the south, the barometer fell rapidly, and a low bank of dark cloud hung along the horizon, slowly but steadily rising, although there was as yet but a fresh breeze. Now and then, too, came strange

intervals of almost calm, then fitful puffs of wind, and then strange rushes of fury which dashed against the sails as if to tear them to shreds. A far off wild moan every now and then arose on the misty, whitening, waves, and rushed with a melancholy, weary echo among the sails and shrouds ; died away, and rose again as the storm increased in its violence, and the strife between man and the elements began in real earnest.

This, however, seemed only the beginning of a fresh breeze, which the crew regarded but lightly, and slept through with their usual calmness and unconcern. In an hour, however, its fury had increased ten-fold. Every possible sail was shortened, the hatches were battened down, the ship was made snug below and aloft, the watches were doubled, all hands on the alert ; while the Captain, if possible, grew keener and more vigilant than ever. For a time all

went pretty well ; that is, the ship obeyed the helm in spite of being struck by a succession of heavy seas, though some few spars had been washed away, one of the boats stove in, and now and then the waves made a clean sweep right across her decks. But as yet there was no sound of alarm on board among passengers or crew. Suddenly, however, in the middle of the night, there came a dull, heavy, shock, which, with a noise like thunder, struck the fated vessel amidships with an overwhelming cataract of water, which at once filled the engine-room, deluged the fires, and sweeping away four or five men into the abyss of raging waves, made the vessel quiver in every beam from stem to stern.

From this time she became more and more unmanageable ; every scrap of canvas had been blown away, and it was as impossible to set more as to carry it. For two

days and nights the *Orion* was the mere sport of winds and waves, gradually settling down to be a mere helpless log upon the waters. Nor was there any sign of the gale's abating. But nothing had been as yet said, either by passengers or crew, of abandoning the vessel, or indeed of being less hopeful than the stout old Captain himself. At last, however, as the next night began to wear away, and a cold desolate tinge of yellow light showed itself over the dreary waste of leaden waters, word was brought to the Captain that "she had sprung a fresh leak," and that in spite of all that the men could do at the pumps, the water was steadily gaining ground.

Then all hope was gone, and there was nothing for it but to take to the boats. All hands were immediately called aft, and told by the Captain what was to be done.

"I know you, my men," he said, "and

can trust you. I rely on all to be cool, and to obey orders smartly and exactly. There are boats enough to save us all if we can get well afloat. The rest is in God's hands. But the first coward or lubber that fails in his duty I'll shoot like a dog."

And the old man drew a pistol from his pea-jacket as he spoke, capped it, and put it back into its place.

The men cheered him, and went readily off to their appointed places, ready to carry out their Captain's orders when the fatal moment should come, and the poor old *Orion* must be left. The passengers had soon all been duly told of the full peril they were in, but though the Captain disguised nothing of the real state of the case, he still gave them every hope of getting away in the boats, and bade them be of good cheer.

But, strangely enough, as all but the

final preparations began to be made, and the dull grey morning grew on towards daylight, the extreme fierceness of the wind seemed to abate ; the squalls of bitter, icy, rain died away, the heavy canopy of leaden clouds here and there broke up, and showed light beyond their broken edges. Hope began once more to dawn on some of the pale faces below, and a whisper of it spread even among the crew. But the older hands looked grim and hard as ever, and all the Captain said to the first Lieutenant was, " We'll stay by her to the last, Watson ; but by sunset to-night we shall be miles away if the boats live, or out of reach of harm's way by many a fathom of blue water."

Meanwhile, some few of the passengers, who dared, had crept up on deck, and there hung about in sheltered corners, wherever least in the way of the men on duty.

Among these were the old Painter, his daughter, and Gerald ; who stood together, gazing out on the sullen walls of black and storm-rent water which towered to a vast height on either side of them. Now and then, over the tops of these mighty barriers as they rose and fell, they caught sight of a gorgeous and flaming sunset which began to crimson the whole western sky. Its stormy fire fell along the terrible trough of troubled sea, and lighted it up with broad dashes as of golden blood ; here and there streaming into sudden and intense brilliance, and the next moment black as night, as the huge mountains on either side, or the awful valley itself, rose or sank under the sway of the tempest.

In this deep trough lay the poor old *Orion*, tossed to and fro as a nutshell on the mighty billows. The sight was superbly, grandly beautiful ; but yet terrible in its

beauty. There was a solemn, awful fascination in it which for a time checked all words.

“Gerald,” said the old man at last, in a low, broken voice, “the stout old ship can’t last through the night. If we should be separated, or if aught happens to me, Gracy is in your charge. More I need not say. Happen what may, it will go hard with every one of us, and many a brave heart will sink, long before that flaming sun rises again from his cloudy throne of glory.”

To this Gerald made no answer but by grasping his old friend’s hand, and giving it a hearty shake.

Grace Clifford was now standing between the two, with one hand clasping her lover’s arm.

“My darling,” he said, looking tenderly into the girl’s loving eyes, that gazed with

piteous hunger up into his own; "my darling, can you trust yourself to me?"

"For ever," she said, "come life or death—always. Nothing can separate us now."

And then she kissed them both; her father with long, unbroken, tenderness; Gerald with a wild and passionate ecstasy, that thrilled his very inmost being. It was a kiss of hope, of love, of despair, and yet of passion, in which her own soul went forth to his. Such a kiss as the lips of a dying wife might give to the husband who knelt by her bedside, and watched as her spirit soared to the gates of Paradise.

Nothing more was then said. But having wrapped the young girl in the warmest, thickest, shawl they could find, they waited for the Captain's signal. Nor was it long in coming. All hands were presently ordered on deck, and told to hold

themselves in readiness. Necessary stores had long since been placed in all the boats, four in number, at each of which stood a fixed number of men under a chosen officer, ready for work at a moment's notice.

Clearly, firmly, and distinctly was every order given; and each as quickly and simply obeyed. The appointed crew stepped into the first boat, then one by one the women and children, in due, fixed order, at the officer's word; and this boat was lowered in safety into the gulf of sullen waters, and floated safely away. But the second, when nearly full, by some unforeseen mischance capsized, and hurled its living freight down to swift death amidst the waves.

For a moment, a sudden flash of panic fell upon every face and every heart; and then a horrible silence, only broken as—

“There rose from sea and sky the wild farewell,
Then shrieked the timid, and stood still the brave;
And the sea yawn'd round them like a hell,
And down with her she sucked the whirling wave.

————— then all was hushed

Save the wild winds and the remorseless dash
Of billows; but at intervals there gushed,
Accompanied with a convulsive splash,
A solitary shriek, the bubbling cry
Of some strong swimmer in his agony.”

But the panic did not last; in the midst of it was once more heard the clear, stern voice of the Captain, bidding them look sharp with the third boat, and be steady with her. Steadily and with care was she gradually filled with her proper crew, and at once fell away from the ship, over the terrible and still heaving waters. The Captain's sharp, clear eye at once detected that the remaining boat could scarcely, without peril, contain the number that remained; but not a word was said by any one. Orders were swiftly given and calmly obeyed. Only Grace and two of the women

and one child now remained to be got on board ; then the crew took their places, then one by one the passengers, until it was Miles Clifford's turn. Then all saw that the boat was deeply laden—at the utmost there was but room for one more.

“For God's sake, jump in,” exclaimed the old man to Gerald.

“Never,” was the answer, “till you are safe. Grace is there, and she beckons to you. Look !”

“Now, sir, be sharp,” shouted the Captain; and as he spoke, Clifford turned for a second and looked at a face pale and mute with agony, shuddered, and stepped down into the boat. Gerald handed in a little dog that had followed his mistress across the deck, and in another moment the last of the boats was swept away from the ship's side into the dark gulf below.

Then, above all the fury of the winds and

waves rose one clear piercing shriek. It was the voice of a woman ; a voice that one brave heart knew to be, of all voices, to him the dearest in the world. It was but one cry ; a single word.

“Gerald! Gerald!”

All he could do in reply was to wave his hand in silent farewell, as he gazed into the troubled waste of waters, and for the last time looked on the face of her he loved, still pale as death, crowned with supreme despair, and mute again with unutterable agony ; yet with a proud smile on it which sent back a swift ray of joy into his heart, as the boat was swept for ever from his lingering eyes.

Then, at last, he turned away. His dream of life was over ; yet he gazed proudly, and with untroubled spirit, over the wide desolate sea where his hopes had all perished, knowing that he had fought the

battle and won the victory. Peace is the fruit of such strife—unbroken peace, which is from God alone.

In the brave old ship there were now but two survivors besides himself, the Captain, and Sambo, an old black servant who had sailed with him on his first voyage, and would not leave him now, though he had been twice told off for one of the boats' crew. Each felt that the end was near at hand, and each in his own way prepared to meet it—a solemn time into which there is no need to enter here.

Within a few hours, long before the sun rose in his golden splendour above that wild and stormy sea, the *Orion* had at last utterly broken up and disappeared amid the waste of waters. The three brave souls were at rest for ever. Their voyage was done, so far, and Gerald Hastings had found out the full truth of his old friend's words, "After

all, there may be something greater than sailing in smooth water, and having sun and wind at one's own choosing :—it may be greater and better to lose one's life than to save it.”





CHAPTER XIV.

L'ENVOY.

“But a page more, Good Reader, and then we part
company. Art content?”

THE PILGRIM'S GARLAND.

OF the three boats which drifted away from the *Orion* on that fatal morning, one was never heard of again. The other two were picked up by some outward bound ship, and in due time reached New York; and among the survivors were Miles and Grace Clifford. The old man's life was drawing to a natural close, and the end could not have been far off in any case. But he lived on for some years, carefully

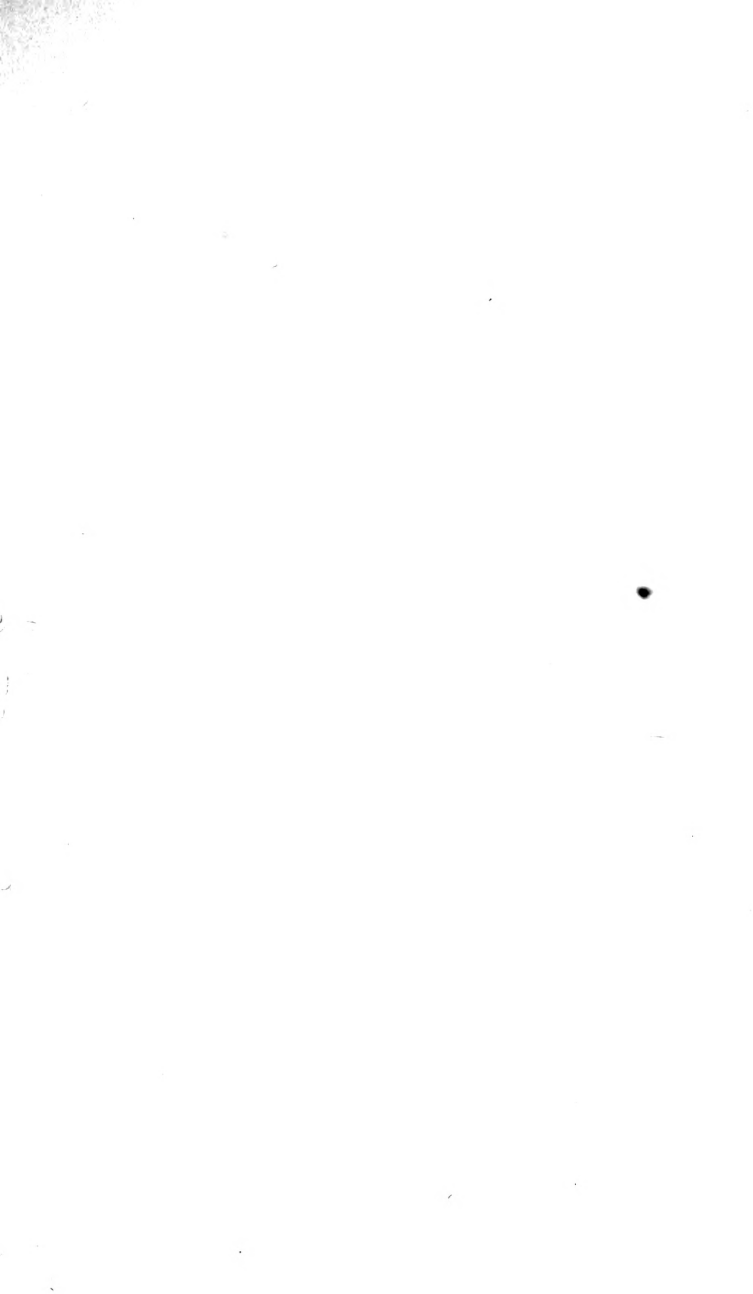
tended by the daughter he loved so well, though, as he said, "the savour of his life was all but gone." Grace still survives him; after his death having given herself up night and day with unbroken love and devotion to the foundation of a Home for Shipwrecked Sailors, where many a sick and weary tar has found healing and comfort both for soul and body. "Sister Grace," the head nurse, the little, tender, dainty woman, in her black dress, and with her tender, winning voice and untiring patience, is a name that thousands have already learned to bless. Her own sorrow is not worn out. But she bears it bravely, and is content to wait until her voyage too is over, and the ship is in the haven where she would be; and the two whom Death has not divided are one for ever.

Far away, too, in England the name of Gerald Hastings is not forgotten. And as

the years go by, there is still one fair and goodly matron who night and morning, as she watches her little son at rest or at play, never forgets whose name he bears ; and to her daily prayer she adds one special petition that her child may live to be worthy of it, and at last prove to be of as gentle, and true, and noble a spirit as he that went down with the *Orion* on the wild Atlantic. Once every year, as the anniversary of the wreck comes round, she reads to him, from an old, tattered, newspaper—as told by some of the survivors—the story of the wreck and of the brave man who gave up his own life to save his friend ; and the boy is never weary of listening to such words. Some day, perhaps, he may prove that the seed of a noble life is never wasted, seeing that weeds and waste belong, not to God's kingdom, but to the Devil's ; and her child may grow up not unworthy of the name still so dear to her—

Gerald Hastings of Barton. Such is his mother's prayer;—some day to crown her old age with a sunset of thankfulness, of happy memories, and of peace, as the night comes on apace, when the time of work is over, and the harvest must be gathered in.

THE END.









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